The Black Cat

AUGUST 1908

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The Black Cat

A Monthly Magazine of Original Short Stories.

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Take the Armitage Case.*

BY FLORENCE TABOR CRITCHLOW.

WHEN the members of the Psyche Club want to prove the Immutability of the Human Will, or the Presence of the Astral Body, or any other little matter like that, they always say, with the air of presenting evidence that is final and incontrovertible:

"Well, for instance, take the Armitage Case."

I am Philip Armitage. What my case really does prove, or whether it proves anything at all, you may determine to your own satisfaction. I only tell the story as it happened. It was, at any rate, a very curious experience.

For I am a plodding business man, not given to dreams in the night, nor to visions by day. Christine says that I have no imagination, which, no doubt, is true. I live by rote, eat my meals at regular hours, go steadily through the day's routine, and fall asleep the moment my head touches the pillow. That I loved Christine is evident, because I married her. But I couldn't talk about it. I just went on loving her, day by day, until she became one of my necessary habits. Somewhere, deep within me, was the conviction that if ever I had to give her up, it would be a losing of

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a part of myself, so that, for the remainder of my days, my soul would go crippled. But neither could I talk of that. None of the precious everydayness of affection should be wasted in order to carry the burden of a possible to-morrow of grief. We were together — we had to-day.

Christine was different. She was a delicate little creature, a butterfly among the big, clumsy moths, made to be loved, yet even so, delicately, lest one bruise the fluttering wings. Oh, yes, Christine had wings, with which she wandered into all sorts of beautiful and impossible romances, while I blundered along the dusty middle highway of practical life. I liked to hear her talk, though I couldn't always understand. Sometimes, I went to sleep, in the evening, when the light hurt my eyes, and my brain was tired with its drudgery. Then Christine called me stupid. Very likely I am stupid. But it is lucky for Christine that I am not of her own kind, for who, then, would look after her while she flies? Only when she insisted upon an argument, or, at least, that I give categorical answers, did I feel uncomfortable. I was content to believe whatever she wished me to, but that didn't satisfy her active brain. She wanted my individual opinion. What did I think about the eschatology of Plato? What was my idea of the personal appearance of the inhabitants of Mars? Did I believe in the survival of the individuality or in the resurrection of the unfit? How did I suppose that we should be able to recognize one another after we were dead?

It didn't matter what I answered, she always took the other side, because she enjoyed opposition, upon which to sharpen her own wits. That Tuesday morning, she wanted to know, if I should die a great many years before she did, how I meant to spend the time until her arrival, granting there should be a place to arrive at. Would I wait, close to earth, for her to come? Or did I mean to go wandering off on lonesome exploring tours before she got there? I haven't the slightest idea what I'd do, because I have never seen a guide book to that other country which could tell us what its customs are, but I expect to do whatever other people do. But I couldn't say that, right off, brutally, to a little sprite in blue cashmere, who was looking at me with big, blue, serious eyes, as though the answer was, at that moment, the most serious thing on

earth, of far greater importance, in fact, than coffee and toast. But I'd noticed how she used my answers as pegs, sometimes pretty strong ones, too, to hang her arguments on, so I thought it was well to turn the tables. Besides, I was reading the morning paper, and trying to decide whether I'd better run out to see Hamilton to close our deal, or wire him to come in. If I could set Christine to answering her own riddles, I could read, and think, and answer a rising inflection yes, when she appealed to me. So I diplomatically reversed:

"But, Christine, supposing it is the other way round? If you die first, how will you pass the time waiting for me? Flirting with Gabriel and St. Peter, I presume."

"If I go first, there won't be any time to wait," she replied instantly, with so much decision that I dropped my paper and gave her my whole attention.

"No?" I questioned, incredulously. "But what will you do? You have your program all arranged, I presume."

"Please do not joke about it, Philip," she softly cried. "Do you remember that legend about the girl who was willing to suffer a thousand years in purgatory, for the privilege of returning to earth for one moment to comfort her lover? She pictured him fretting his life away because of her absence. She found him kissing his bride. She was forgotten. We shall never be separated, with such a possibility before us."

She was so solemn that I became serious. The intensity of her low voice was almost uncanny, even at the breakfast table on a smiling morning in spring.

"You mean to kill the other woman, and come back to stay, like Poe's Lady Ligeia?"

"No," she shook her head, and frowned. "Poe's incarnate will was a very foolish girl. I shall not need to come back, because," she made a long pause, — "because, I shall take you with me," she finished, with a little dash of triumph in her voice, albeit her eyes pleaded wistfully for a confirmation from mine.

"Then, you believe that, in principle, Ligeia was right, — that the human will can accomplish whatever it does will, even after death, or, rather, that it is the will which survives?"

"As to the will," she slowly shook her head, "I do not know. It

may be true, for the will — who has tried what it can do? But of this I am certain, that Love never dies, that Love can do all things. Why," her face lighted with the discovery which at that moment flashed upon her, "Why, all the great, the immutable laws of science, those laws which, to the worker in the laboratory, stand for God, what are they all but Love? The Attraction of Gravitation, that bogey which they use to frighten the ignorant, is only the expression of inorganic affection. For the first time in my life I see that in actual fact God, the First Cause, Nature, whatever name you give to the power that controls the physical universe, is just Love."

As I watched her dear, flushed, adoring face, I could easily imagine that her theory would hold good. In truth, she was not in the least like Poe's dark incarnation of Will. Why do poets and novelists invariably make their blondes gentle, with colorless characters, while giving strength, fierceness, ability, for good or evil, to the daughters of the dusk? Is it only for the sake of symbolism? Yet why should brightness and weakness be synonymous? Christine was neither pale nor dark, nor of that dead sallow betweenness commonly called brown. Eyes, and hair, brows and lashes were all of the same shade, the warm, ripe color perhaps best described by the old-fashioned term, hazel, while her complexion was like the creamy velvet of a rose. She was so small, so fragile in appearance, that it seemed absurd to connect her with that quality of intellectual muscle called will-power, yet I felt sure that whatever she determined to do she could, whether by will or by love, if they twain be not one.

I had to run for my car, leaving the argument hanging at loose ends, and forgetting to speak of Hamilton. He wired me to come to his country place, Redwood Croft. I tried to telephone to Christine that I could not get home that night, for she always worried herself into a headache if I were a half-hour late for dinner without warning. The line was busy, every time I called, until, at the last moment, I gave up and sent a boy with a note. How could I foresee that the boy would lose the note, and that Christine's imagination would work double-time all night? My sleep at Redwood Croft was even sounder than usual, although, toward morning, — or it may have been after daylight, it seemed to me that

the house was a little shaken by the vibrations from passing trains. At least, that was the only explanation that occurred to me, though I could not remember that Hamilton's place was near the railroad. But I drowsily reflected that in a valley like the Croft, vibrations can be felt from a very long distance. My next consciousness was of some one standing by the bed, speaking to me, trying to wake me, trying to make me get up, shaking me, trying to push me out of bed. Without opening my eyes, I knew that it was not yet six o'clock, though I could not have told how I knew. In fact, although I was right, I do not yet understand in what manner I received the information. But why should any one wish to rouse me at such an uncanny time of day? Breakfast, I had been informed, would be ready between eight and nine, and the only train to the city did not leave until nearly noon. I did not want to waken. I fought against it — I tried to make myself think that there was no one there, that I was in a nightmare, that I must on no account yield to the delusion. By the way, I never have nightmares, nor do I often dream. I determined that I would immediately go back to sound sleep. Then I opened my eyes, to look straight into Christine's bright brown ones.

"You must hurry, Philip, if you want to come with me, I have only a little time, and then your opportunity will be gone. It may be a long time before I can come again."

She spoke in the most matter-of-fact way, as though her presence and her errand were both understood, and needed no comment. I did wonder how she had come, since there was no train later than the one by which I arrived. But the fact of her being there did not cause me any surprise. At least, looking back, I cannot remember that it did, though as to that I may be mistaken. I am quite sure that I felt no alarm, nor even any curiosity concerning a remark which now, looking back, strikes me as very peculiar. When I heard the words, I must have supposed that I knew what she meant, which is considerably more than I now dare to suppose.

In the dull gray light, — for the morning was extraordinarily backward, — she helped me dress in a hurry, handing me the articles I needed. No one was stirring in the house, as we passed down the stairs, so that I wondered, if she came that morning, who had shown her to my room. My wonder grew, when I found

the big front door locked and bolted. But perhaps she arrived last night. Yet Hamilton and myself had been the last to come upstairs. After our business matters were arranged, we sat late, talking of school days and later adventures. Christine, a few steps in advance, tried in vain to turn the great key, nor could she lift the old-fashioned bolt. She turned to me with the smiling helplessness of a little child, the appealing way she had which made me love her the more:

"I guess you'll have to help me, Phil. The door sticks. I don't seem to have much strength, since I passed over to this side."

I didn't know what she was talking about, but who would expect a little creature such as she, to have the strength for such tremendous locks? Our hands met as we fumbled the key. How I loved the touch of her velvet fingers! Then we were out of doors, in that strange, hushed air of the early morning in the country. At that time of day I always feel as though the earth had been made anew since I lost it in the dusk of the evening before. For the joy that was in me, on this particular day, for the lightsome heart that carried me across the grass, I might have been Adam, going forth with Eve, on our wedding morn. In very truth, although we, or I, did not yet know, the earth had been torn to pieces and re-made, and the workman's untidy fragments were yet lying about. The broken trees, the stones loose in the pavement, fallen bricks from the chimneys, all these things seemed only evidence that Hamilton was very careless about repairs.

To my surprise, Christine led the way to the building used to shelter Hamilton's new automobile. Matthews, the chauffeur, slept within. In answer to her loud and imperious knock, after considerable delay, Matthews came to the door. In his eyes was the look of one who has been face to face with the terror that flies by night. He was an exceptionally intelligent man, who had been with Hamilton, in various capacities, for many years. His face lighted with relief when he recognized me, but he stared uncomprehendingly at Christine, whom, as it happened, he had never before seen. She spoke abruptly:

"How soon can you have the motor ready for a run to the city?"

"Not for an hour anyways, ma'am," he answered, respectfully. "Mr. Hamilton didn't say he'd be wanting the machine so early.

I'd be having to wait for my breakfast, an' Cook probably ain't even up yit, unless she be sayin' her prayers after the earthquake."

"Earthquake," I repeated, "was that an earthquake I felt this morning? I thought it was a freight train."

"Then for sure you're a heavy sleeper, Mr. Armitage. I thought for one spell we'd be falling through to Chiny."

"We won't wait for breakfast," Christine interposed. "In fact, we cannot possibly wait. We must be home before —", I lost the last words.

"Well," returned Matthews, "I wouldn't want to start off without a bite."

"Oh, you don't need to go. I can make the run, all right, if you'll see that everything is ready and in good order before we start," she rapidly explained.

Matthews looked at me. I nodded.

"It's all right. This is Mrs. Armitage, my wife. If she says she can run the universe, you take her word, she can."

To tell the truth, I was, as children say, "dumbfoundered," for I had not known that Christine had ever touched a wheel. But I always stood by her. Matthews grinned appreciatively.

"All right, if you say so, sir. I can have the car ready in a very few minutes. Mr. Hamilton has me keep her in trim, in case of emergency."

He was at work as he spoke, so that, in an incredibly short time, we were on the highway. With ever growing admiration I watched this wonderful wife of mine.

"Of course, I know how," she flashed back, in answer to my unspoken thought. "Why, I can do anything, anything. I had no idea it would be so easy. Just to need, to desire with your whole heart, and you can."

It was true. She used to learn her school lessons with the same ease. The road was new to me, for I had always traveled by train, yet I recognized every landmark, anticipated every turn, with the fine instinct one might exercise in the village lanes of his boyhood. Our speed was doubtless entirely proper, but to me, who am no motor maniac, it seemed terrific. When we were thrown together, as happened once or twice, her brown hair brushed my face, and I caught the exhilaration of her mood. When I screamed

some comment, she flashed back a look that made my senses swim. I had never known that she was so lovely. In her face was a new quality, that faint elusiveness which converts negative into positive beauty. This is not so much perfection of line or of coloring, as it is a suffusion of an inner spirit of beauty, that which the Greek sculptors symbolized by the attributes of a god, and which the mediæval painters wrought into the golden halo. Watching the play of this new and essentially spiritual light on the features of my beloved, I scarcely noticed the passing of time, until we were entering the city.

Do you think I am going to describe that day in that doomed city? Volumes could not do it. Those who were there, who saw their homes shaken down about their heads, who ran for their lives from the thousand fires, cannot, in all that remains of their days on earth, complete the description of those hours of terror. While we threaded our way through the fleeing throngs, into the midst of the smoke and the flames, I lived my thousand years of purgatory. To tell what I saw would be to relive another millenium of torment. One thought of comfort, one ray of heaven, illumined the anguish: Christine, in some miraculous manner, had escaped. I knew not why she was carrying us both again into the midst of the fight for life, unless she hoped that my presence might avail to save some relic of our home.

Some one, a policeman, presumably, ordered us to halt, to turn back, to carry people out of the city. If Christine heard she gave no sign. We were in our own street now, rushing through a cordon of police. We were at home, now, or in front of what had been our home, a heap of débris. Christine was on the ground, and flying through the door, before I had an opportunity to ask what she thought we had better do. The sentry either did not see her or she was too quick for him. Me he barred.

"Keep out," he said, not unkindly, for he may have guessed that this had been my home. "You were lucky not to be inside when the roof fell. They're going to dynamite it in a few seconds."

"But my wife is in there," I cried desperately.

"Hold hard, young fellow," he spoke sharply. After a look at my face, his voice softened. "You are excited. If she was in

there when the crash came, she died before she ever knew what happened. But — you've only just come in from the country, I see — she may have rushed out at the first shake. You'll probably find her at the Fort, or the Park. If she was injured, and yet got out alive, she's being taken care of at the Pavilion."

The delay exasperated me. I shook off his hand, and tried to explain that she had but just gone in, perhaps to fetch something, and that I ought to be with her. He could not understand. Others had come up. In an undertone, which was, nevertheless, clearly audible to my strained attention, he told them his opinion that I had lost my wits from grief and excitement.

"Better humor him," advised a superior officer. "He will be more likely to get over it, if he sees for himself. If he don't, he'll dream about the possible horror to his dying day. I'll hold off the dynamite a few minutes."

"Well," the other grudgingly assented, "It may keep him out of the asylum. But it ain't a bit of use."

We found Christine in her own bed, pinned down by timbers. The officer tried to draw me away, for she had the look of death. He promised to send men to release the body and bring it down, but I called his attention to the possibility that she was uninjured. For, although she would have been unable to release herself, she was so protected by pillows and blankets that she might have escaped fatal blows. Moreover, as I bent to kiss the white face, I found the lips warm and red, and at that moment her eyes opened with a look of recognition. The men were called. In a few minutes we bore her down the broken stairway, with not a bruise on her fair body. I held her in my arms, in the motor, and looked helplessly around. She was faint, and weak from fright; I thought it could be nothing else. The Captain saw my dilemma and picked out a man to act as temporary chauffeur.

At that time there was, there could be, but one thought, one purpose, — to seek instant safety. But later, when we were safe at Redwood Croft, housed, fed, clothed, we each, in our several ways, and according to what we severally knew, began to puzzle over the events of that morning. For myself, I wondered why Christine had come to fetch me back into danger, as well as to how she had come? Again, why did she flee from me into the fallen house, and

how, in the few seconds before I followed, had she met with such an accident as without doubt had befallen her? And as I thought on these strange things, I remembered that, when she stood at my bedside, in the early dawn, she wore her usual street costume, with hat and veil. But when we found her upstairs, apparently lifeless, she was in her nightclothes, lying in her own bed, as one taken while asleep.

She was yet an invalid, from the shock she had sustained, the fright, and the exposure following her rescue. No questions could be asked until her strength returned. But one day she herself surprised me by opening the subject.

"Tell me, Phil," she began, "How did you guess the danger I was in, and how could you get there so soon?"

The question puzzled me a bit, but Mrs. Hamilton, who had heard my story, motioned me to keep silence.

"Tell us first, my dear Mrs. Armitage," she gently suggested, "just what happened to you."

"I don't know—" Christine hesitated, and gave me a doubtful, pleading look, "it seems unkind to tell on Phil, after he risked his life to save mine, but—he didn't come home Tuesday night. I didn't know where he was, and I worried all night. Toward morning, I wrapped myself all up in the blankets and pillows, and, I suppose, cried myself to sleep."

Mrs. Hamilton gazed reproachfully at me. She was a motherly old lady, with the beautiful white hair and sweet eyes that make you feel like a very foolish and very young little boy, when you are caught doing wrong. I shook my head.

"I sent you a letter, by special messenger," I defended myself.

"I never got it. As I said, I was crying, and must have fallen asleep. The next thing I knew, the house was tumbling all about me. I tried to get up, but couldn't. I thought of you, wondered again if you had been killed the night before, which was the only possible excuse I could make for your neither coming nor telephoning, and tried to think of some way in which I could get help. Then I heard the shouts of fire, in the street outside. Of course I didn't know the world was in flames. I thought that it must be only our house, and that the roof had fallen in because of what had already happened from fire. In that case, there was no hope for me. I ex-

pected death in smoke and flame, any minute. I was glad you had, at least, escaped that. I remembered our discussion at the breakfast table, and my vain boast that I would cause your death to follow mine immediately. Instead, you had gone first, but you would not have long to wait. The horror of the manner of my death to come made me faint. The next thing I knew you were bending over me, holding my head, the men were lifting those heavy planks. For the rest, we've been together ever since. But, Phil, how did you know? Mrs. Hamilton says you were here all night; how did you know, how could you get there in time?"

I repeated the story I had told the Hamiltons, essentially as I have given it to you. Christine laughed.

"You goosie! How could I come after you, when I hadn't the slightest idea where you were, and when, as I've just told you, I was fast in my own room? You had a dream, which made you worry, and you started to come home the quickest way possible. Besides, why, Philip, you know that I never in all my life touched the machinery of an automobile."

To corroborate my story, I called in Matthews. You may imagine my amazement, when he declared that on that Wednesday morning I had come alone to the garage, had assured him that I understood the motor, and that he had seen me start off like an old hand at it. Mrs. Hamilton says that that is what he told her and her husband, when they missed me at breakfast time. This is as far as we have been able to get in sounding the mystery. For, as you can readily see from my story, I do not know a carbureter from the funnel of a tugboat, and couldn't run an automobile ten feet without a smash-up. I neither knew nor dreamed that Christine was in any danger, — in fact, had no idea there had been an earthquake until Matthews told me. Now, what I want some one to explain, is, Who drove that automobile to the city Wednesday morning?

The Baby's Part.*

BY FRANCES BOONE MITCHELL.

I SHALL have to ask you to hold baby until I can get some milk. Poor little angel, he is about starved."

"But I — I" Ann stammered — and then gazed helplessly at the squirming piece of humanity, so hastily and unceremoniously deposited on her lap. The woman had vanished. "WELL" — Ann gasped for want of anything else to say, and Ann was seldom at a loss for words. "Rather abrupt, don't you think so?" Ann smiled sweetly at the man opposite, his forehead creased into two straight lines of annoyance. "Of all the confounded limits, she was the leader" —he growled. "If I only knew where she went or how she looked I would go after her and make her take the infernal" — "Don't call the poor little thing names, Dick! See, you have made him cry." Something surely had. The deserted infant was testing the capacity of an unusually vigorous pair of lungs. "Poor little tootsie — it's hungry, so it is, but its mover will be back in just a minute with some nice milk for the poor little starved fellow." Ann cooed softly and soothingly — deftly she turned the infant across her knees after the time immemorial method of pacifying young humanity. "Little chap is hungry — yes, he is." Ann's voice was full of deep, vibrant caresses. The long, straight lines faded from Richard's forehead — little, deep ones appeared around his mouth. He watched Ann from under half-closed lids — decidedly this was a new and altogether wonderful Ann.

"By jove, she is a wonder," he breathed under his breath. He was almost glad it had happened. "She's grit clear through," he murmured.

"Euchred!" he yelled, springing to his feet. "Ann! Ann!

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the train is moving, and" — "Hush, Dick, he's about asleep." "But the woman — the train is moving, I tell you."

The train was surely moving — how long it had been in motion, neither knew. Ann had been absorbed in her efforts to quiet the now sleeping baby, and Richard lost in admiration of Ann.

"Dick, what shall we do?" Ann spoke after a long silence spent in staring at the swiftly moving landscape.

"Pitch the thing out of the window" — the masculine element growled.

"Be serious, Dick — what shall we do? — it's only a few minutes until we reach Wentworth."

"Give it to some one else," Dick suggested brightly. "There is no one in the car to give it to." "Leave it on the seat then."

"It would fall off." "Pin it on, then." "Dick, how can you be so heartless?" "Well, we can't take it off with us," he said doggedly. "Tom is going to meet us — we can't let him see it — confounded lubber — he sees a joke in everything — we would never hear the last of it. We will have to leave it on the train."

"Richard Manning, we won't leave the poor little thing on the train, by itself — it must be properly cared for by some one."

"That some one isn't going to be us. Its mother won't claim it. She's deserted it." "You know better, Richard." Ann, when displeased, had a very decisive way of saying Richard. Richard realized that it was time for him to do something practical; at the same time he must appease Ann. "Of course she will claim it," he agreed. "Rather out of the ordinary, isn't he?" "Certainly his mother will claim him, Richard." Ann was not easily appeased.

"By jove, the conductor is coming. We will leave it to him."

"Good boy, Dick." Dick smiled. Ann was appeased.

In a few words he explained their sudden and unexpected acquirement of the baby. "Describe the woman." The man of tickets spoke gruffly. "We can't, you see I was looking at Ann," Dick floundered helplessly. The conductor looked expectantly at Ann. Ann blushed. "I can't. I was —"

"Looking at this young man," the conductor supplemented grimly. "However, the mother of the child will probably wire to the next station."

"But we get off there — something must be done at once — " Dick spoke desperately.

"If that's the case, so much the better." The conductor spoke more affably — he saw all the responsibility vanishing from his shoulders. "Your wife can take charge of the baby, until its mother reaches there, on the train following this — it's only twenty minutes later."

"But she isn't my wife — yet, you see," Richard spoke desperately. "We are — er — we're going to be married there." He straightened his shoulders, as if he defied the entire world to try to stop that ceremony. "You see, Ann's father — " The conductor collapsed into the seat across the aisle and roared with laughter.

"So you are the eloping couple — you — are Major Deering's daughter?" he spoke to Ann, between paroxysms.

"There is an official searching through the train for you — he is in the next car." Richard moved over beside Ann; his face several shades paler. Ann forgot the sleeping baby and clutched Dick's coat sleeve. "Ann — " Richard gasped. "You will not tell." Ann looked at the conductor as if to measure her antagonist. The conductor looked soberly at Ann. "I suppose I will have to" — he said.

"But you must help us; papa wants me to marry a horrid old friend of his — and there's Richard — " she paused, as if the fact of Richard's existence made further explanation unnecessary.

"Papa's friend is rich, no doubt, and Richard is not, I suppose." The conductor spoke as if he were weighing Richard in the balance and Richard was found wanting.

"Richard has his law practice; he will make plenty for us — " Ann flared — then changed tactics. "Please help us," she said. No one resisted Ann when she said please. Ann's "Please" was a word of art — Ann realized it. Richard smiled; he knew the battle was won.

A smooth-faced individual came down the aisle. Ann and Richard braced themselves. Ann kept her eyes on the conductor in Ann's conquering way.

"You won't find your parties in this car, Jenkins." The con-

ductor arose as he spoke. He turned to Ann. "That's a fine little chap — be sure you take good care of him," he said. Ann smiled her thanks. Ann's smile was dazzling.

"I suppose you are right, Flinch," Jenkins spoke undecidedly, but if it wasn't for the baby that couple certainly fit the description. Jenkins looked searchingly at Richard. "He is about twenty-five — tall — clean-shaven — gray eyes — brown, curly hair. He counted each item off on his fingers. The description fitted Richard. It was Ann's turn — deep blue eyes — light, wavy hair — slender — medium height — brown dress — brown hat. That certainly fitted Ann. Ann bore the scrutiny and enumeration better than Richard; she was absorbed in watching the baby's sleepy efforts to get a pink, chubby hand in a mouth fully a size smaller than the hand.

"But the baby" — Jenkins swore softly under his breath. Ann's father had offered an alluring reward to the party who stopped the runaways. Jenkins was not romantic; his was a grasping nature. "Yes, the baby eliminates them;" Flinch spoke promptly and decidedly. He stood aside so that Jenkins could pass out first.

"You will reach your station in about ten minutes; I am sure you will find your message all right," he said pointedly to Richard.

"We sure will — but it will be all right anyway," Richard spoke promptly. Ann smiled at him approvingly. "Bless the baby," she said softly, as she gathered it up in her arms and kissed a tiny, dimpled hand.

"Same here," Richard echoed fervently. "Hang Tom and what Tom says."

The Angle of Prejudice.*

BY MARY MACMILLAN.

E had gathered for tea, as we did every afternoon. It was at Bryn Mawr College, where the tea-drinking habit is grafted upon many a malarious and coffee-soaked young woman. We were in the hospitality of a gracious, generous, altogether magnificent pair of girls, whose study, being on the ground floor, was not only the fortuitous loafing place for any of our crowd, but was the habitual rendezvous from toil in the late afternoon. It was not a cozy room and there was hardly a thing in it that could be called pretty, and yet one always felt at ease there in a comfortable sense of removal from all over-taxing annoyances.

This afternoon one of our hostesses had not yet returned from the biological laboratory, and the other was in her bedroom reading up some French. They would have put themselves to any inconvenience rather than cause us to hold ourselves unwelcome, and we, with our dominant good humor, had got out the cakes and crackers and put the kettle on to boil. The talk was even more remarkably serious and diverting than usual, being upon love, that subject to which women revert as inevitably as men to business — I was going to say politics — but business includes even that now.

One of the girls had been defending, as usual, her belief in platonic affection, and another, with humorous scorn, disavowed faith in any not founded on the rock of purely intellectual sympathy.

"But suppose there isn't any intellect?"

"Then there is nothing I would call love."

"That reminds me of some one who said that if you are a writer you must turn your inside outside, but what were you going to do if you hadn't any inside."

"You can't always tell from where you sit," remarked Billy,

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who at present sat in a corner of the window-seat. We all turned and looked at her — Billy so seldom said anything, and this was not a subject we would have expected her to have any sort of opinion upon. "You can't see around the corner of a house, and your own temperament may be a prejudicial angle that prevents you from seeing into other people," Billy went on, dropping a lump of sugar into her tea. We all sat dumbly regarding her, except the platonic affection advocate, whose tongue would not have been restrained by any sort of miracle.

"Billy, child," she said, "you'd better run along now and get your hands washed for dinner — you are too young to know what you are talking about, and we ought to have been more thoughtful than to introduce such a subject before your innocent ears."

Billy stirred her tea. "There are as many different kinds of love in the world as there are differing personalities," she said, "I used to think there was only one sort of Love, spelled with a capital, a magnificent thing like the American Beauty rose; but it has been borne in upon me that there are many varieties of roses, and after all, roses are only one kind of flower. Sometimes you find a violet in September. I'll tell you a story of something that made a deep impression on me, if you care to hear it."

A story from Billy was without precedent. Billy was from the West and nobody knew why she had been nicknamed Billy, unless it was because it suited her so imperfectly. She was tall and big and strong and athletic, without being masculine; she was quiet and unobtrusive and tractable, without being weak; she never told her grades and never talked about her family, and yet you could feel intimate with her; she never was jolly, and yet you would always miss her; she was a senior, and would be the youngest girl ever graduated from the college.

"I had known the people all my life," she began, "as one knows everybody of any social position in one of our small western cities. They were, of course, both older than I, and I had never liked either of them. Probably the foundation of my dislike was a feeling of mental superiority — the child is a dreadful snob in one way or another, and I think I must have been a most callous little intellectual snob. They were neither of them college-bred, and from the cradle I had always meant to go to college. I didn't like

their names. His was Hartwell Merrick. He was a Virginian and bore a family name, as the custom is in the South, which seemed effeminate and affected to the crudely democratic ears of my extreme youth. Her name was Laura. Now there is no logical reason at all for any one's disliking the name of Laura, but I did; it always suggested to me a necklace of beads with a heart-shaped locket attached. She was a Swedenborgian, which again was a black mark for her, I being a most bigoted little Presbyterian. She taught a class in Sunday-school and her doting little girls were everlastingly giving her presents. She had a palavering old mother with whom she was positively intimate. The old lady was a 'foolish, weak, but amiable old thing,' like the mother of 'gentle Alice Brown'; of course one must manage such a mother, I admitted, but not attempt to find in her an enlivening companion, as Laura did, or pretended to always, both at home and abroad. She was tall and had sloping shoulders and soft eyes that I would have called dreamy if I hadn't thought them mushy, and she giggled in a way that I, with the hard contempt of my years, considered an attempt to be thought either funny or sociable. She had the most uncontrollable light wavy hair, but I observed that she never made any effort to restrain it, and I attributed her apparent carelessness to misplaced vanity. There seemed to me to be nothing sincere in her flexible frame, and I was rather gratified by her consistency when she began to go with a little thing like Hartwell Merrick.

"He was very little, considerably shorter than Laura, slight and delicately made. Built on a large scale he would have been handsome, but in his own dimensions he realized that most detestable thing, a pretty little fellow. He must have felt his deficiency and despised it, for he made every effort to appear large and masculine, wearing coarse, rough material in his clothes and most outlandishly heavy shoes; but there was no getting out of it. The only thing manly about him was his voice, which was big and rich and deep. It was always a surprise, and it seemed an incongruity — a joke of nature.

"He did jokes, by the way, the sort of thing that newspapers entertain business men on street cars with. He was the habitual funny man on a paper and contributed to weeklies and magazines.

I have heard that it was his secret ambition to write a tragedy and that he did write a great deal of pathetic poetry, but there was no market for it, so he continued to make his living by being humorous about old maids and hen-pecked husbands.

"Well, he began to go with Laura, and it seemed to me a most fortunate coincidence; it would have been a great pity for either of them to have got hold of anybody nice. He was very assiduous, and soon they became engaged, the engagement lasting three or four years. I suppose jokes are not excessively lucrative — it must take a particularly bright one to make an eagle scream. Finally, however, they were married one autumn and started off on their wedding trip, I being in the car with them, coming back to college for my sophomore year.

"One passes from the age of scornful severity to that of amused toleration, out of indifference into curiosity. I was delighted to find the wedding party in the height of their inanity occupying most of the car when I arrived. There was enough rice to make a good dinner for half the Chinese nation; there were white ribbons and flowers everywhere, and the girls, in their low-necked evening gowns, were as shamelessly carrying on as if they had been in their own parlors at home. Mr. Merrick was expanding and beaming until I almost thought a fairy had worked a charm on him and he really would begin to grow large, and Laura was giggling at anything anybody said or did, and that meant incessantly; for they were exerting themselves with that effort toward hilarity which only the society people of a small western place know how to push to its limit.

"At last it was time for the train to start, and some of them were nearly carried off, and there were shrieks of laughter; Laura's giggle being heard at the top always of all the hubbub. My seat was just back of theirs on the other side of the car, so that I couldn't have helped seeing everything even if I hadn't watched, and I did watch — they were so very entertaining. As soon as they were rid of their exuberant friends he began to give her his whole attention, hanging up her coat, brushing the rice off her, helping her remove her hatpins and veil, pulling down the window shade to let just so much sky into her view, distributing the grips so that she would have plenty of room. He seemed to be one of

those quick, fussy little men who show their affection by everlasting feats of no importance. I thought he would set some women crazy, but she accepted it all with delighted composure, and every now and then they beamed at each other with happy comprehension.

"They had noticed me and spoken to me when they first came in, and I felt sure that they would include me later on in their all-embracing joy to the world. I also knew that I was going to keep out of it — it was amusing to be an onlooker — and I did not care to know them more intimately. They didn't object to a multitude of observers, they gloried in their happiness, and were as delighted to exhibit it as a man might be with a precious stone he had just found. I have always thought little Mr. Browning was exactly like that. They were proud to parade themselves as bride and groom to me, to the porter, to the prosperous Hebrew gentleman across the aisle from them, to any one who might be lucky enough to be within hailing distance, from our town on to Philadelphia, whither they were bound. Their clothes were new and bravely bridal, and it was with reluctance that they disengaged the white ribbons from their grips. She giggled at the rice on the floor, and he smiled at it with indulgent joy and mashed it and scraped it and spread it out with his foot.

"Well, things went on in this amicable way. He talked to her and she giggled. He looked at her and their eyes met and said wonderful things which had little to do with the manufacture of shoes — the subject most at the heart of the prosperous Hebrew gentleman across the aisle. They never ceased to be diverting to me and contenting to each other, and I began to have the impression that life would forever go on with them like this — he had found the one who liked to be captivated, she had found the one whose chiefest pleasure was to entertain her.

"We had started in the evening, and the next morning, when I got out of my berth, I found Mr. and Mrs. Merrick already up and freshly devoted. They looked newer and blander than ever when they passed me on their way out to the dining-car to get their breakfast. They stopped to hope I had had a good night's rest, and he made use of his approximate attitude to insinuate her hand into his coat pocket.

"Our train had lost time in the night, before we reached Pittsburg, because of a wreck, and the loss of a few hours was the cause of still further delay. Finally, however, the conductor must have considered things clear ahead, and we began to make up time. I never travelled so fast in my life. I delayed going in to my breakfast because of the unpleasant speed, as one doesn't like to eat in the thrill of a thunder storm. I didn't like it; I like slower going, particularly through those round, bosky, green mountains of Pennsylvania, that are beautiful enough to be looked at. We were going like that at a furious rate, when something happened. I can't describe it any other way — we were wrecked, thrown off the track. It was as if the earth had suddenly shot off at a tangent and for that brief second I felt myself flying through eternity. There was that awful grinding sound that I remembered to have read of, or heard people describe, and I felt a terrified curiosity to know what would happen next and how it would feel to be dead. I wasn't hurt even. I discovered myself on a bank of deep grass, where I lay for a few minutes stunned; then I began to hear the screams and groans and it came to me that I must help the ones who were hurt.

"I couldn't tell you about it, if I wanted to. Men write of battles or accidents as if it were possible to get a poised bird's-eye view, but in the midst there is no plan or proportion, no beginning or end, no comprehension of the whole. One is conscious only of immediate details. It was all a hideous jumble. People — people were held down by car-seats and crushed in between broken panels. They were cut and mashed and mangled. You couldn't tell what you might find under any heap of splintered mahogany and plush cushions. I was too weak and shaking from the nervous shock to do much. People were running here and there, too busy or too excited to pay any attention to me. At last a doctor came across me, and seeing that I still had my wits about me, asked me to help him. I followed him, and he stopped before what seemed not living nor dead nor human — a mere bunch of torn clothes with something still inside. They had got him out somehow, what was left of him. It was Mr. Merrick, the efficient little bridegroom. They had carried him a few yards and laid him on the soft grass, which I doubt even if he recognized for grass. He was all there —

only so changed, so cut and bruised and crushed — a mere little, loose, shapeless lump. He had always been pale, now he was ashen — that word I had never credited before — and as he looked up at me and smiled I felt a quick quiver inside me at the courtesy, for he was dying.

"'Doctor,' he said, 'I'm done for. My wife, you said, was not dangerously hurt?' the doctor bowed his head, 'but she's probably badly shocked; you mustn't let her come to see me this way — it would almost kill her, and she would never get over the memory of it. I devoutly hope I can't last but a few minutes longer. I have heard it said that when a man is mortally hurt the shock prevents him from feeling pain, but I — pardon me,' his eyes turned to me, 'pain makes people impolite — I'm damned in hell. Don't let her know I said it — don't let her know I suffered. Don't let her know I'm dead till she's strong enough to bear it. Now, for God's sake give me a hypodermic, and then don't waste any more time with me but go to the fellows you can help.'

"We gave him the injection and I asked to stay and sit with him a little while — I was pretty sure it would only be for a little while. He closed his eyes and rocked his head restlessly to and fro. I wiped the perspiration from his face and sat there silently. He mumbled to himself, and thinking he might be saying something he wanted me to hear, I leaned down and listened close to his lips — he was praying for her. Pretty soon the morphine began to work and the spasmodic jerking and rolling ceased and he lay with white, quiet lips. Once he opened his eyes and looked up at me with a long, yearning gaze as if his soul lay bared, and I saw that they were beautiful eyes, such as Balzac described 'that met no limits forward and left none behind.' At last he said, 'thank you, don't let her know.' I thought it was the morphine that made his tongue so thick, but it was not long till I found that he was not breathing. I had never seen death before.

"The doctor came back in a few minutes and gave orders about Mr. Merrick to some men and asked me if I felt able to go with him to a girl he thought was Mrs. Merrick. 'She doesn't know,' with a keen look to search my strength, 'and it isn't worth while to tell her, for she won't be long after him.'

"I followed his hurried leadership around the end of the

wrecked train and to the other side, where she was lying on an improvised bed of travelling rugs and rain-coats. She looked up at me with a tender, pale pathos. 'You haven't seen Hartwell?' she asked. 'Yes,' I said, wondering what lie I might have to tell.

"'He is hurt dangerously, the doctor says. But he will get well?'

"'He will be all right,' I answered, in a lame attempt to follow the doctor's hardy falsehood.

"'But he is hurt so badly that he can't come to me, otherwise nothing would keep him away. It seems one must always have something to be thankful for, even if it is only a wretched circumstance like that. I am so very glad he will not see me this way — it would break his heart.' Her beautiful hair was matted and unsightly with blood, but I knew it was more than the esthetic effect she was thinking of. 'I am not suffering very much physically,' she said, 'tell him that — tell him I did not suffer at all. But don't tell him I am dead till he is quite out of danger. Tell him I thought of him as long as I could think — for I shall — and tell him that I love him; oh, he knows it, but he will like to hear I said it. Please, doctor, go to him and don't bother with me.' Then when the doctor still delayed, doing things to make her more comfortable, she begged him in the urgent haste of pitiful weakness to go to Mr. Merrick and give him all the attention that could be spared from the others.

"Again the doctor went away, and I made a pillow for her and did what I could. She noticed everything I did and was so grateful I might have been deluded into believing I was accomplishing something. Perhaps I was — not for her, but through her.

"'You are so young to see all this,' she said, and I thought I had never seen eyes so tenderly solicitous, 'it is I that ought to be taking care of you.' Then I broke down and cried. She took my hand with hers that wasn't broken and stroked me and said, 'don't, dear.'

"That was the last of it. They each died without knowing about the other, longing for each other and never thinking of gratifying that selfish longing. They met death with simplicity and self-sacrifice, with heroic thought of the other, with — oh, well, I haven't words for it. It was not the suffering that impressed me,

nor the cruelty of it all, nor death itself, though it was the first time I had ever seen these things. It was the nobility of these two I had misjudged."

Billy finished as she had begun, unexpectedly. We had forgotten to light the student lamp and only the blue alcohol flame burned under the kettle to tell us that dusk had gathered.

The Return of Chee Lee.*

BY JAMES FRANCIS DWYER.

HE arrows of a westering sun ricochetted along the greasy surface of the sea, and the sand beach was a sheet of white flame under their fire. The coral teeth of the Great Barrier bit viciously at the charging combers and tossed up spray that fell like a shower of blood. A Japanese pearling schooner beating up towards the Straits was the one splash of brown in the belt of red ocean.

Verlund cursed. The strip of velvety shadow swung round the hut, as if hiding from the yellow glare that licked at it hungrily, and his bare legs had been stripped of their shade covering. I crawled after him as he snuggled closer to the wall. The locusts were singing noisily in a clump of small gum trees near the beach, and I was thinking how silent it would be after they had finished their song when my companion startled me with a question.

"What brought you up here?" he asked, sharply.

"I am at a loss to say," I answered. "I drifted up to Rockhampton, and one spring day the tropics bulged and sucked me in closer to the line."

Verlund was regarding me curiously. He was the true type of the spineless tropical deadbeat. The soul of man dies in the tropics. It swoons under the glamour, the color and the light, and wrecks like Verlund are the result. A tattered shirt ballooned over his sun-tanned body — a pair of trousers with amputated legs was his only other garment. His hair was thick, black and oily, covering his ears and hanging like the tassels of a mat before the heat-tormented eyes.

"Get back," he said, slowly. "Get down to Cairns and jump a boat to Sydney. This place is hell — plain hell."

The locusts stopped singing for a moment, and the silence fell

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upon us, deathlike, tangible. The sound made by the waves floundering on the beach seemed to be muffled by some smothering force.

"What brought you?" I questioned, endeavoring by speech to relieve my ears, that strained to catch faint sounds.

"Me?" he croaked, moistening the cracked lips as he stared up over the red waters towards China. "Why, the devil brought me, and a girl and something else kept me."

The locusts took up their chorus again, a wild, shrill, ear-splitting farewell to the dying sun. The sand dunes seemed to pant under the glare. I edged farther into the strip of shadow as the splintery beams bit fiercely at my exposed hands. Presently Verlund spoke again.

"This is where men come to die," he said. "This infernal place drugs them, poisons them, scorches their souls."

He laughed mirthlessly and kicked the stringy-bark sides of the shanty till the little glittering lizards hurried into their holes.

"I got here in '94," he continued. "I was down at Melbourne and got cleaned out over the Cup. Patron won it, thirty to one shot, and I contemplated a long dive into the Yarra when the tropics beckoned. They call you in the night when everything is still, drag your heart with a net that's all lilac and rose-pink and sapphire blue, and you wake hating the hard streets and the hum of toil. That's how I was caught. I stowed away to Cairns, worked my way up here, and the devil chained me with the murmur of the surf and the silence, and I couldn't get away."

A Chinaman went down the hot track at a quick trot, and Verlund's eyes watched him through the screen of uncombed hair. The Celestial turned a headland and was lost to view.

"She belonged to that yellow swine's partner," he muttered, nodding towards the spot where the Chinaman had disappeared.

"Chee Lee?" I questioned.

"Yes, Chee Lee. She was the tiniest, sweetest little ball of femininity that ever came down out of Chrysanthemum Land. That hound had no ties on her — Chee Lee, I mean. Who the devil told you about Chee Lee?"

"I heard something," I muttered evasively. "Something about you awaiting to see him."

Verlund's discolored teeth showed as he grinned. "Oh, yes,

Hanrahan talks a lot, doesn't he? Well, I am waiting to see Chee Lee. He's been gone eleven years in November. He grabbed 'The Waratah' that night and bolted down to Rockhampton and I lost him there — lost all trace of him, so I came back here and watched. Sun Low was Chee Lee's partner. Sun Low is a scoundrel. Chee can't get a sixpence of his own money till he comes back for it. He'll come some day to settle with Sun, and I'll be here to settle with him — see?"

I nodded. I understood why Verlund's credit was good at the grocery store owned by Sun Low. Verlund was the bogeyman that kept Sun's partner out of the way.

"She used to sit on that old veranda next Buttan Singh's, where the wistaria blossom hangs like bunches of grapes, and every time I passed I wondered why she didn't bolt from that old, toothless murderer. She'd peep at me from between the flowers, just wondering — there were only two pure whites up here then. Then one day, when that old devil was knocked out with too many pipes, she saw a diamond snake wriggle up under the veranda boards, and she gave a little cry of fear just as I was passing. Sun Low was in the store, but I flung the snake at him after I killed it, and he ran screaming down the track, leaving me with her and that doped hog, Chee Lee. She laughed when I chased Sun, just a delicious, little, fluffy laugh, and that yellow pig snored on the floor. I ought to have killed him then — the Law doesn't work at a gallop up this way.

"Then I acted the fool. I took an interest in that little child just because there was no one round here but the scum of Asia. You think it wasn't my job, but it was. It's a white man's job to look after a child no matter what her color, and that den wasn't the place for her. It went along like that for five months, perhaps six. Sometimes I thought that Chee looked at me curiously, but I didn't care for him. Then I determined to go South again, and the night before I left she came down to the hut and begged me to take her in the schooner down as far as Cairns. Of course I was a fool. Everybody I tell this story to thinks the same, but they didn't know that pock-marked Chinaman. They didn't know what kind of a quarter this was at that time, and they didn't know that child. I'm a white man — at least I was one then.

"I was working for Tatsu Garo, and I was using his schooner. That little kid was going to meet me down at the point, but I changed my mind and slipped up to the store when that pig was in his dope dream, and told her to meet me at high tide in the mangrove trees up the creek. Chee was snoring behind the canvas, but afterwards I fancied I heard him chuckle.

"It was dark when Tatsu and I pulled up to the mangroves. I saw something white in near the left bank and I called out, but she didn't answer. I called again and again — then we pulled in closer and saw. She was strapped by the ankles to a thick limb, her head hanging downwards, and the tide was gurgling round her shoulders like as if it was pleased with the job Chee left it. That's the story. I swore by the memory of my mother that I would avenge the death of that little kid, and I'm holding out. She was nothing to me — she was just a little child woman up in this spot alone. Yes, I'm waiting for Chee. He'll come back some day, and we'll have a reckoning."

The locusts had finished their song, night was blotting out the red glow on the waters, and the white gum trees stood up bare and ghostly. Verlund rose, shook himself, and walked off towards the beach.

Five months afterwards I was speaking to Kuttan Soo, the Hindoo horse dealer, in the main street of Cairns, when a mounted trooper, with a white prisoner handcuffed to his stirrup iron, rode slowly along. Something familiar about the amputated legs of the trousers made me lift my eyes to the face of the shackled one, and a look of recognition flashed across it. A tongue hurriedly moistened the dry lips, and the prisoner half turned towards me.

"I got him," he yelled triumphantly. "I got Chee — Chee Lee!"

"Murder," whispered Kuttan Soo. "He knifed a Chinaman at Red Point yesterday."

It was Verlund.

The Professional Bridesmaid.*

BY ANNE PILSBURY.

THEY sat on the stairs, the conventional short-story location—the Bridesmaid and a Guest. The Bridesmaid, rather more weary and bored-looking than the most approved type of fictional bridesmaids ought to look, ate her ice indifferently, languidly decapitating a small vanilla chicken which invited her approval from his spun-sugar nest. The Guest, however, seemed to be enjoying his portion. Respecting the Bridesmaid's evident fatigue, which caused him much inward concern, he spoke but seldom; offering occasional answerable or unanswerable remarks, links that bound the long golden silence-beads of their chain of conversation. They had known each other but a few months, the Bridesmaid and the Guest, but they knew each other very well.

The Guest, considering a massive square on his plate, casually remarked, apropos, "This cake, now,—I suppose the new Mrs. Plympton may have made it herself."

The Bridesmaid laughed, very merrily for a weary bridesmaid.

"Poor, simple, ignorant-of-the-proper thing, Mr. Errington!" said she, "do you not know, can you not instinctively feel, that the refreshments with which we have been refreshing ourselves were, in the language of Aunt Prudence, 'fetched all the way from Boston just on purpose for tonight,' or to quote the more elegant diction of tomorrow morning's Daily Star, 'At midnight a bountiful collation was partaken of, served by the celebrated Boston caterer, Horatio Bun—' or whatever his name is?"

The Guest regarded his cake with awe. Then, after casting a glance down the stairs and through the banisters in search of possible eavesdroppers, he whispered, "Can they afford it?"

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"Wicked!" said the Bridesmaid, shaking a disapproving forefinger. Then, after looking through the banisters and up the stairs, adding in a scarcely audible whisper, "Should you think, now, they could afford *me*?"

They stared at each other comically for the space of half a minute, the Guest, meanwhile, groping about in his mind for a reply, till relieved by the Bridesmaid, who said primly, fixing her eyes on the spun-sugar nest, "Since we have each delivered ourselves of anarchistical utterances let us now proceed to be polite and proper, for instance: How charmingly the Smithers do things! don't you think so, Mr. Errington? This wedding, so perfect in all its details."

The Guest laughed. "What if I refuse to be polite and proper and choose to return to our anarchistical topics?" he inquired; then continued hesitatingly, "I have wondered, Miss Carey, — at least, — I have thought it awfully kind of you to serve Miss Smithers as bridesmaid. She isn't exactly a particular friend of yours, is she?"

"Particular friend!" cried the Bridesmaid, "particular friend seven times removed, besides being unaccommodating enough to dwell in a dwelling seven miles removed from my own, over which distance I must roll in my carriage (known as a buggy on unceremonious occasions), at three o'clock tomorrow morning, when I trust my duties shall have been conscientiously performed. But, mentioning duties, can you see what the people are doing downstairs, Mr. Errington?"

The Guest pressed his face against the rails and peered down into the hall.

"They seem to be arranging the sitting-room," he reported.

"Drawing-room," corrected the Bridesmaid.

"They seem to be arranging the drawing-room," meekly proceeded the Guest, "for dancing. Are you sure it's quite the proper thing," he added anxiously, "to sit on the stairs? Everyone seems to be sitting up straight on those little gilt chairs."

"Aunt Prudence will be glad to know they got the good of them," commented the Bridesmaid. "You are improving, Mr. Errington. With a few lessons you would soon be ready for the degree of Bachelor of Etiquette. "But," gathering her skirts

hastily for a downward flight, "I must return to my bridesmaidenly tasks — I had forgotten, though, my — my ankle."

"Your ankle! have you hurt it, Miss Carey?" exclaimed the Guest. "Oh! pray do sit down and rest. You have no idea how terribly tired you look!"

"Tired! I look terribly tired, do I?" cried Miss Carey. "That is the last straw that breaks the bridesmaid's ankle," collapsing with the words into a corner of her stair. The Guest, all sympathy, took advantage of the sympathetic moment to gain a more adjacent stair.

"Save your tears, Mr. Errington," cried his companion, "my ankle is bone-whole. I will confess all. After having executed the feat of securing the bride's veil with three hairpins, having prevented the dear little flower-girls from tearing each other's flowers to pieces, and having shaken them into an understanding of their performing parts, having instructed the bride's mother as to just the moment when a few reluctant tears would be effective, having searched for and found the bride's father, and extracted him from under the newspaper where he was peacefully enjoying his regular after-supper nap, having seen the ceremony through without a hitch, I longed for a few minutes' rest. Poised on an improvised step-ladder, engaged in rearranging a bit of disarranged decoration, an original inspiration seized me, — the true and tried resort of 'sprained ankle.' The result, I feigned a sprain, I said, 'I cannot dance,' I limped to this hiding-place, where you found and refreshed me."

"Thank you," murmured the Guest, in acknowledgment of the somewhat ambiguous compliment.

"Now you know me in my true character," continued the Bridesmaid, "as anarchist, misogamist, fraud. Think of me what you will."

"You know very well what I think —" began the Guest in such a very "different" tone that the Bridesmaid interrupted hastily:

"Don't you want to hear some more about my trials? Your advice, too, I should prize."

"I suppose so," mumbled the ungrateful Guest.

"You have not been long enough in Bayboro to learn the true

state of affairs," the Bridesmaid went on, ignoring her audience's unappreciative mood. "During the last three years I have been a bridesmaid no less than fourteen times. Seven of these times I have served brides whom I could hardly claim as acquaintances, three out of the seven were actually strangers to my bow, before the wedding preparations. I cannot trace the beginning of my popularity. Suffice it to say I am considered the proper thing in bridesmaids. I dare not refuse a request, for fear of upsetting the whole solar social system, which in a small city like Bayboro, you must needs know, is exceedingly delicate. Distracted, I fly to New York during the most popular bridal season. But it is to no avail.

They postpone their weddings. I am consulted on my return as authority on the latest New York designs in weddings. I am obliged to spend more than my allowance on a succession of correct gowns and absurd hats, while this evening I am suffering a nervous agony of apprehension, lest the piercing eye of the bride shall identify this muslin frock as the same one I wore six weddings ago. Indeed, it is the same, with the addition of these rosebud wreaths; — but my purse would most certainly have been bankrupt had I bought one more this season." She paused, sighing deeply.

The Guest seemed plunged in thought, but presently he spoke.

"Miss Carey, I possess the solution, — the remedy."

"Oh, joy!" cried the Bridesmaid, "tell me at once, that I may purchase my release. Is it expensive?"

"No — that is — I don't believe it need be," replied the Guest, somewhat confused. "But you must promise to follow the directions before I divulge the formula."

"That seems hardly fair," demurred the Bridesmaid. "Suppose it should be poison. That would certainly cure my complaint. May I ask, may your remedy not be more disagreeable than the bridesmaid malady?"

Something in the Guest's expression as he glanced up to answer her question caused the Bridesmaid to stoop over quickly, ostensibly to gather up several tiny rosebuds that had fallen from her wreaths, murmuring the while interrupting remarks about the unstability of rosebuds and the like.

When she looked up her face was aglow, whether with interest or mischief it would be hard to decide.

"You believe in telepathy, don't you, Mr. Errington?" she said. "I know exactly the remedy you have been thinking about. It has just flashed into my head. Do you know that is an old Gilbertian idea, too? I will become a professional bridesmaid. I have always longed for a profession. I will immediately have some neat folders made with 'Miss Augusta Carey, Professional Bridesmaid' on the first page, and tucked away modestly on the last page, following a brief resumé of my experience and accomplishments, my scale of terms, ranging from 'church' through to 'home' and just plain 'ministers.' Of course you hesitated about explaining how I might make a neat thing out of it, but I am just as much obliged to you for the thought."

"I wasn't thinking of any such a thing," stoutly protested the Guest. "No such idea ever entered my head. I don't approve of women entering the professions, anyway."

"Jealous?" suggested the Bridesmaid. "But in this case, sir, you cannot possibly protest. No man could possibly fill the position of bridesmaid. Therefore, in following this profession I will not be cheating any man out of his daily bread."

"Some poor man will be mightily cheated if you persist in following it forever," boldly declared the Guest.

"Hark!" said the Bridesmaid, "isn't that the bride's mother calling me? She probably wants me to count out the rice. Coming, Mrs. Smithers!" (to an imaginary bride's mother.)

"One moment, Miss Carey. How about those lessons in the Proper Thing? When am I to begin the course?"

The Bridesmaid meditated on a rosebud thoughtfully. "I am afraid, Mr. Errington," she said in a business-like manner, "that my duties in my profession will leave me no time for giving instruction."

Then the white muslin and the pink wreaths vanished up the stairs, and the Guest was left forlorn, with only a little pink rosebud for company.

. . . . . .

Mr. Errington, walking up the broad path to pay Miss Carey a polite afternoon call, rejoiced in his heart to meet on the wide stone

steps a departing lady caller. Having been greeted by Miss Carey in the parlor he immediately began:

"I called to inquire if you could not be induced to change your mind, and squeeze in a very short lesson once in a while? Do you think it right that you should keep all your genteel knowledge bottled up, without so much as sharing an occasional drop with a fellow-man? Have you ever thought of the matter in that light?"

"Perhaps not," answered his hostess absent-mindedly. "Mr. Errington, what do you suppose was the parting remark of the young woman you met as you came in? *This* was it: 'Miss Carey, did you ever notice that brides select the homeliest girls they can find for bridesmaids?"

"Preposterous!" exclaimed Mr. Errington. "At the very few weddings I have attended I have particularly observed that the bridesmaid was infinitely more beautiful than the bride."

"I'm not so sure," mused Miss Carey; "three weddings ago the account in the Daily Star said: 'The delicate coloring of Miss Carey served as an admirable foil to the superb brunette beauty of the bride.' — Admirable foil!"

"Perfectly ridiculous!" said the caller. Then, thinking the subject needed changing, "By the way, how is business, Miss Carey?"

"Rushing!" was the reply. "In fact, I was obliged to turn away my last client, who has just left me — hence that parting bullet. You see I soon would be shot to pieces by remarks if I refused often, so it is well I have adopted bridesmaiding as a paying profession."

"Are your folders out yet? I haven't received one."

"They have not yet come from the printer's. But do you want one? Do you need one? Indeed, I assure you I shall be only too glad to serve as bridesmaid at your wedding, Mr. Errington. Confidentially, I will give you a special price, too, considering our friendship."

"Miss Carey, I hate to injure your professional feelings, but I positively wouldn't have you for bridesmaid at my wedding. But if you will only listen; that is really the subject I came — "

"Oh, Mr. Errington!" interrupted Miss Carey, "before I forget it I will instruct you on one Proper point. I think I see a

new caller turning into the path. If she comes in, you must remember on no account to outstay her, but to politely take your leave before she shows any signs of making her adieus. That is one of the strictest rules in the Bayboro Proper-Thing book, and if you are wilfully disobedient, or even forgetful, just once, your social doom is forever sealed."

"Miss Carey, let me instruct *you* on one Proper point. Even I know that in the Primer of Etiquette, on page one, is printed in coarse print, 'Never interrupt, never, *never* interrupt your elders.' Again and again are you guilty of this primary—"

But the interrupting door opened to announce Miss Cornelia Plummer, who, having shaken hands elaborately and been introduced, glided to a chair with a fluttering of many frills.

"I suppose you have heard that I am to be married the twenty-sixth," she began, somewhat embarrassed by the gentleman present. "Well, you mustn't breathe a word about it to a single soul. Now, I want to have the most novel and original wedding that ever was and give Bayboro something to talk about. I've just racked my brains for months and I've hit upon some fine ideas. For one thing, I'm going to have an Empire wedding. You know American imperialism and all that is all the rage and lots of people say that Mr. Tupper looks exactly like pictures of Napoleon Bonaparte. I am to dress like the Empress Josephine, in white satin, of course. You are to be my maid-of-honor, Augusta. Then there'll be five bridesmaids, and the colors of their dresses must spell out the word e-m-p-i-r-e. You, Augusta, in emerald satin, then mauve, purple, iris or iridescent, rose, and I've thought and thought, but I can't think of any other original color beginning with e."

"Elephant's breath," suggested Mr. Errington.

"Elephant's breath! the very thing, and so cute!"

"Perhaps you can help me out, Mr. Errington," she continued, beaming upon that gentleman, "about the reception after the church. I want a roof-garden reception awfully, but our roof is kind of Mansard and I can't seem to think how to fix it. Living over the store the way we do we haven't much room in the house."

"What sort of a store is it?" inquired Mr. Errington.

"Pa's store! Ice cream, soda, all kinds of cake, nuts and

candy," repeated Miss Plummer in the tones of an advertising phonograph.

"Why don't you ask your father to close his store for the day?" glibly suggested Mr. Errington, though a glance sent him by Miss Carey should have warned him from proceeding, "then you could hold your reception there, and your bridesmaids might serve soda, cake, nuts and candy from behind the counters, which would be a much more original scheme than hiring a caterer."

"Mr. Errington, you are just splendid!" shrieked the delighted Miss Plummer. "I shall surely send you an invitation."

Then in a whirlwind of grateful obeisances, directions to Augusta, and fond farewells, she was gone.

The two people that she left in the quiet room sat for some time in silence, till the silence was broken by the lady, who said in a somewhat chilly voice, "You may as well leave Bayboro by the next express, Mr. Errington. You are socially dead."

"Miss Carey," began the socially-dead one, earnestly, "forgive me for speaking so frankly, but do you not feel that you have some social responsibility here in Bayboro? Ought you not to try to do something to stem this tide of absurd extravagance?"

Miss Carey looked at her inquisitor keenly.

"Now that you are talking so sensibly, Mr. Errington, you have my whole attention. There is no subject that is nearer my heart than social responsibility. But what can I do?"

"No one can do more than you, Miss Carey. The first thing that you ought to do is to marry — er — marry a deserving man, and by a simple wedding set the fashion for years to come."

Miss Carey shook her head, smiling ever so little.

"I am afraid I am not unselfish enough to sacrifice myself, even if I were to be sacrificed on at attractive, plain, mission-style altar. But here is Georgiana Ernest coming up the walk. She is as interested in social problems as am I, and doubtless far more sincere. A nice girl, and deserving, too. You might speak to her, Mr. Errington."

. . . . . .

On a certain twenty-sixth of April, a certain Wedding Guest, who has appeared in this character once before in our history, hurried on his belated way toward a certain wedding reception.

Within half a block of his destination a chorus of joyful whoops proceeding from said destination, and divers visible signs hovering about the same, struck a sudden chill to his heart. He strode along, only to grow chillier still when the forbidding brick front of 196 State Street hove in sight. It was true, all too true.

The curtains of the broad plate-glass windows, those broad plate-glass windows, the particular prides and joys of the Confectioner, Hosea Plummer, were drawn down, down to a narrow, tempting crack.

To the casual passer-by, these curtains, dully brown and thickly non-committal, presented the quaint appearance of being bordered by a fringe, a fringe composed of the wriggling backs of a row of small boys (varied by an occasional, unable-to-resist older person) whose feasting, envious eyes, by the way, glued to the crack, formed an appropriate and decorative border, to the plain green linings facing the store.

The Wedding Guest, shivering with apprehension, allowed himself to be ushered in at the wide door by a shame-faced ex-street gamin, whose democratic legs are, for the occasion, encased in silken imperial insignia of vassalage. Inside the door the chilly, long-gathering nerve wavelets burst over the conscience of the unfortunate Guest in one great billow of guilty horror. What with the babel of a thousand voices, the chaos of a hundred-hued guests, and the tumult of his own mind, he could distinguish but one object or person in the whole store — an emerald satin Bridesmaid who, with a dignity worthy of the proudest lady of the Empire, herself, dispersed plain and ice cream sodas from a glittering soda fountain. Before many minutes the Guest stood before the soda fountain.

"What can I say, Miss Carey?" he gasped.

The Lady of the Sodas regarded a silver butter dish conveniently situated on a shelf across the store.

"I congratulate you, Mr. Errington, on the success of your original and brilliant plan. You should forsake the law at once, and turn professional Designer of Functions."

"Great heavens, Miss Carey," cried the Guest, "you can't imagine, can you, that I ever dreamed that Miss Plummer would seriously carry out such a ghastly joke?"

"What flavor do you prefer, sir?" said the Soda Lady, imperturbably. "We have lemon, vanilla, sarsaparilla — "

"Oh, bother!" murmured the Guest, as he was elbowed from the counter by fellow-guests. Moodily he made the rounds, like a frock-coated floor-walker run wild, evading the outstretched hands of Mauve, who offered him a sticky, pink-frosted lady-finger, and of Purple, who would have had him partake of a particularly poisonous-looking purple ice, and paying no heed to Iridescent, sitting in lonely state behind the nut counter.

He studied the wedding guests, and again made the rounds.

"Miss Carey," he said, taking advantage of a lull in the run on the soda fountain — "I would rather die than have you wear youself to death in this wretched way! You know it, don't you?"

But not one morsel of frozen sweetness in the way of a word would she throw to him.

He wandered away again, and found the bride and groom, holding their levee in the cashier's booth at the far end of the store, under a canopy of rose-colored fly-netting, and shook the hand of the Empress Josephine so effusively that Napoleon scowled.

Rose and Elephant's Breath hailed him from opposite counters, with offers of chewing gum and motto lozenges, respectively. A motto in checkerberry script on a white sugar heart caught his eye: "Faint heart never won," — followed by an "Etc.," crowded into the point of the heart.

He braced himself, and, going up to the soda fountain once more, whispered:

"Miss Carey, your father has just telephoned for you to come home at once. Better hurry. I wouldn't stop for hat or coat."

Betraying no emotion, and speaking not a word, Miss Carey followed Mr. Errington out of the store, and into a rack-a-bones hack drawn up expectantly before the door, seeming not to notice when her escort boldly followed her into the carriage. They rode in silence. In silence they walked up the broad path. In silence they entered the cool, dim house and the familiar parlor. Here at last the sinner must confess his sins.

"I must tell you, Miss Carey, your father didn't telephone, but I simply had to get you away somehow."

The Bridesmaid sank wearily into a chair.

"I knew, I knew," she said; "Father's in New York and Mr. Plummer hasn't any telephone."

Again silence reigned, — a thrilling, expressive silence. There was a newly-arrived note lying on Miss Carey's severely-practical, yet dainty-in-spite-of-itself little desk, and the lady, nervously clutching at it, tore it open. She had read but a page, when the slimpsy sheet slipped to the floor, while the eminently sensible Miss Carey, burying her face in her hands, burst into as hysterical a flood of tears as ever the most impractical and senseless young woman was guilty of.

Mr. Errington, defiantly disregarding every remark ever made on the subject, by contributors to the Etiquette Column, picked up the offending note and read it through, then as defiantly tore it in many scraps and threw the scraps into the waste-basket.

The Bridesmaid, having meanwhile gained partial control of her tears, was drawing toward her a sheet of note-paper.

"Miss Carey," inquired Mr. Errington, "did you ever have a writing teacher when you went to school? Do you remember how she helped you form your letters properly?"

"I'm sure — I — don't — remember," was the response.

"Very well, I will refresh your memory, or help you supplement a faulty education, by assisting you to form this letter properly in the way it should go."

Gently but firmly grasping the small, cold hand that held the pen, he guided it across the white sheet and across and across again. The hand underneath resisted and rebelled occasionally, but the only result was the occasional formation of a strange character, which the recipient doubtless vainly strove to imitate in her future epistles. Gently but firmly the uppermost hand guided till the note was finished, and read as follows:

My dear Miss Pettigrew:

I shall be obliged to deprive myself of the great pleasure of being your bridesmaid on June eighth, as on June seventh I am to be married to Mr. Eric Errington.

Very sincerely yours,

Augusta Carey.

Bayboro, April 26th.

. . . . . .

Mrs. Errington, followed by Mr. Errington, entering her break-

fast-room at Pine Tree Inn, on the morning of June eighth, was not long in spying a note, which showed a corner invitingly from underneath her breakfast plate. Holding it at arm's length, she read the address impressively, "For Mrs. Eric Errington."

"The very first," she laughed, while she split the envelope carefully with the tine of a handy fork. "Let us hope it brings a good omen."

Mr. Errington, as usual, violating a staunch Proper Thing canon, watched operations over his wife's shoulder; and this is what they read together:

BAYBORO, June 7th.

MRS. ERIC ERRINGTON,
Pine Tree Inn, Farmdale, Vermont.

MY DEAR MADAM:

I know you will be delighted to hear of the lovely idea I've got hold of and that I've postponed my wedding on purpose to wait for you to come home. The idea will be the Latest for Bayboro, but Alicia Cunningham, who is just home from New York, and who told me about it, says that for years and years they have been all the rayge in New York and Boston. How slow we are in dear old B. to be so behind the times. It's queer *you* never heard about them, but I don't blame you for not letting on when you had everything your own way as bridesmaid. Well, the point is to have a matrun-of-honor instead of a bridesmaid or maid-of-honor. I know you'll think it's just fine and will let me know what date you are coming home and I will have my wedding any date after that you say. I must get ahead of everybody, tho', and have my matrun-of-honor before any one else catches on, for they are sure to be all the rayge when once they get started. Expecting to hear by return mail, I am

Very truly yours,
EVANGELINE PETTIGREW.

P. S. I must have you for my matrun-of-honor because you are the prettiest matrun I know.

P. P. S. If you are my matrun-of-honor and we set the style, you are sure to be all the rayge, more than you were for bridesmaid.

Mrs. Errington dropped into her chair, convulsed with laughter, but she managed to turn a stern face upon her husband.

"Mr. Errington, I married you for no other reason than to avoid all this, and now you have made things worse than ever!"

But Mr. Errington, fierce of brow, was searching pocket after pocket for his fountain pen, as he said: "Please remember, madam, *I* am your business manager now."

The Miser-Fly King.*

BY DOSS BRITTAIN.

A HEAVY ring of smoke from Old Barney's pipe obscured the rough counter, as Dave Willetts carefully poured an ounce of gold into the scale-pan of the general store at Balladena, from a leathern bag containing nearly two pounds of the precious dust. Willetts had not been among the very first to rush into the wilderness at the call of gold, but for some eight months past he had been developing a very fair prospect, eighty-five miles away among the hills, and was now making his first visit to town for supplies.

"Hi! Look out there!" exclaimed the store-keeper, and Willetts turned in time to see a monstrous horsefly dab down on the little yellow mound, turn quickly over, and flit away like a heavy yellow moth. The scales no longer balanced.

"Might as well try to ketch yer shadder!" cried Barney, as the miner made an ineffectual effort to grasp the insect as it darted out of the door and took a high, direct flight through the saffron atmosphere of a July afternoon.

"How long have you been out in camp? Haven't you read the papers?" enquired the store-keeper, while Willetts poured on a good half-thimbleful of gold to make up for the deficiency caused by the fly.

"Why? What's in the papers?" asked the discomfited prospector.

"Here — I'll show you," replied Barney, selecting a copy of the Sacramento *Echo* from a pile of yellowing papers under the counter, and pointing with wrinkled, stumpy finger to a displayed article headed "Depredations of the Miser-Fly."

Rapidly Willetts scanned the account, with its large "scare" head, dwelling on the extraordinary performances of an insect

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which naturalists pronounced to be the common horsefly, but which had now acquired a new name, through its apparent thirst for gold. Then he went on ordering the rest of his outfit of beans, canned goods, powder, fuses and tools, weighing out the dust as the amounts were called off.

"Careful, stranger! Don't you see 'em?" again shouted Old Barney. "Cover your gold, or you won't have any to weigh!"

Four large horseflies flew heavily over the head of Willetts, yellow with dust. While he was staring at them, another dropped down on the little yellow cone, flipped over with acrobatic agility, eluded the gold-hunter's grasp, and was gone. Willetts was gaining experience and losing gold at the rate of many dollars a minute, and the rest of the transaction was carried on by means of a small bell-glass placed on the scale-pan. It had a little hole in the top, fitted with a funnel-shaped accessory, into which the gold was dropped. But, even as it was poured, two enormous horseflies alighted on its side, and were with difficulty driven away to permit a reading of the scale.

"Tell me more about these critters!" cried Willetts, now interested in them nearly forty dollars' worth.

"Well," replied Old Barney, "the first I knew of 'em was early in March. We had a saucer of gold dust in a broken showcase, and in two days it was empty. We filled it up, and in about the same length of time the dust was all gone. Then we watched, and found the flies getting in through a small break in the glass. They were covered with some sort of sticky stuff, and were unusually active. They wallowed in the dust, just as you have seen them, and flew out. We caught a few, by stopping up the hole, but couldn't wash off the metal. We had to burn the flies — actually smelt 'em — before we could recover the gold!" And he ended with a laugh which somehow jarred upon the ears of his listener.

Early next morning, with what dust Barney and the flies had left him carefully concealed in a buckskin belt, Dave Willetts left Balladena, with the intention of making the trip back to his camp in two days. By making a slight détour he meant to stop over night at the cabin of an old friend, Ben Richway, who, he had heard, was prospecting some forty miles southeast, in Green Gulch, about half way to his own camp. He had not seen Ben

since the old days, when they had been suitors for the same girl, for, when David Willetts had married Helen, Richway had responded to the call of the gold, and gone West to search for it.

David's thoughts, therefore, ran backward and forward, shuttle-like, as he picked his way down the almost perpendicular walls, hundreds of feet high, of the deep cañon called Green Gulch. Time had passed unnoticed, but when he looked at the sun he found it was within an hour of being down. His burros stepped carefully, with cat-like tread, so steep and precarious was the trail. One of the crags gave forth a piercing scream, and a startled eagle flew down the cañon and disappeared. As the eye of Willetts followed its flight, he perceived a light blue smoke curling upward in the still air from a prospector's cabin at the bottom of the gulch, and he knew from the directions he had received that it must be the abode of Ben Richway. It stood on the edge of a precipice, a sheer thousand feet above an apron of ragged granite blocks, and he recalled his informant's remark:

"You'll have to climb mighty hard, and you'll find him a pecooliar cuss. Think he's about two-thirds locoed!"

Willetts had been but little astonished—a remembrance of certain of Ben's old idiosyncrasies coming back to him—and when at length he came in sight of a man sitting in a moody attitude at the foot of the perpendicular cliff on which the cabin was perched, he had to cough to attract attention.

Never had he seen a human face marked with such an expression of hopeless despair as that of his old companion, but its nightmare look gave way at once to the light of recognition and cordial welcome, as the staring eyes were lifted to his own.

"You are the very man I was just wishing for!" Ben Richway exclaimed, springing to his feet, dropping the rifle that lay across his lap, and holding the hand of Willetts tightly in a grasp of extraordinary warmth. But, even as he talked, helping to unpack the burros, his strange gray eyes gleamed with the untamed brilliance seen in those of a coyote.

Half an hour of hard climbing, lightened by gay chat, was required to reach the aery dwelling of Richway, which Willetts saw, to his surprise, to consist not of one log cabin, but two, with a considerable space between them. In front of them, just bal-

anced over the abyss, was a huge boulder of granite, weighing perhaps a thousand tons. David Willetts attributed the rock to a freak of nature, and the peculiar double house to a whim.

When their pipes were aglow after supper, they lived over again their old schoolboy experiences, but some subjects were tacitly avoided, and it was even with some reluctance that Willetts brought himself to ask: "How are you getting along prospecting?"

It was with a strange, careworn face that Richway replied: "I'm not doing any just now — in fact, I've done none since early spring" — but he seemed unwilling to speak further.

Willetts lay awake a long time, haunted by the awful look of despair, the fierce, unhuman brightness of the eyes, and the odd behavior of his host. But while wondering why there was no apparent means of communication between the two semi-detached cabins, and fancying that Ben replied "The flies would bother me to death," he thought the big balanced rock in the front yard, jutting half its length over the precipice, was about to fall upon him, when he awoke in broad daylight to find Richway shaking him vigorously, while a delicious odor of frying bacon filled the room.

After breakfast David ventured to put the question that filled his mind, and Richway, with seeming carelessness, led the way to the mysterious apartment, windowless, and with a door opening outward. As they approached the door, Richway, who was about to open it, paused suddenly, snatched his guest's watch-chain loose and crammed it into David's pocket, exclaiming, "You don't want any gold about you here! For God's sake, man, close your mouth! — Your teeth are full of it!"

Before Willetts could recover from the amazement caused by this strange and uncanny address, Richway had jerked open the door, and there was an angry roar, as if a hundred bee-hives had given up their inmates. Millions of buzzing insects darted out in every direction — lighting everywhere, but staying nowhere. Willetts, who thought his eyes would be knocked from his head, could only see that they were of mammoth size, and darted wildly from place to place. For a moment he stood staring, open-mouthed, Ben Richway smiling slowly at his blank astonishment — and then there was not an insect in sight.

"What are they?" he stammered, at length.

"They are the Miser-Flies — millions of them — and I am their King!" cried Richway, leading the way into the gloom of the pitch-dark interior, and closing the door. Then, bidding David stand still, he opened, at the opposite end, a shutter two feet square, and dozens of insects darted in with bullet-like velocity, dropped with a splash into a broad vat of fluid covering two-thirds of the floor, until, in a few minutes, it was alive with swimming, scrambling creatures, which Willetts now recognized as horseflies. After wallowing in the liquid, they crawled out on slanting boards, dried themselves, and flew slowly to a row of holes in a canvas compartment, occupying most of the other third of the building. In the dim light Willetts stood, amazed and awed, watching swarm after swarm of Miser-Flies, yellow with gold, dart in, almost exhausted from lengthy flights, drop into the vat of mystic liquor, gradually assume their normal dark appearance, dry themselves, and disappear behind the canvas screen.

Ben Richway tilted the vat, and a sixteenth of an inch of gold dust glinted upon the bottom: "It will be an inch thick by night!"

"How do you make them do it?" Willetts could not help asking, as they walked away, while flies continued to drop into the golden pool with a patter like that of a tremendous rain-fall.

"That is my secret, but I am going to impart it to you before you go," said Richway, pointing to the tilting rock which they were approaching. "I have been at this thing since early spring, and I don't know how much I am worth — but there are sixty-two sacks full of gold in that grotto!" He indicated a black spot on the face of the great granite boulder.

As if to give his guest a nearer view of the opening to his titanic treasure house, Richway jumped lightly upon the rocking boulder, and advanced toward its center. "I want you to have it all, Davy, and make Helen happy!" he said, a glad light shining in his peculiar eyes. While he spoke he took another step forward, the great rock with its golden hoard tipped slowly, and then, with the roar of a thousand thunders, plunged into the abyss.

The Captain's Special Passenger.*

BY FRANK H. SWEET.

IT was possibly nine o'clock in the evening, with the sky overcast and threatening rain. Captain Morain had just returned from a final inspection of the three good launches that swung at the landing-float, and was hoping that something worth while would turn up, for he was feeling rather more than fit and very much on the make, as he put it to himself. When he reached the door of his cabin he took a last look up and down the wharf to see whether there were anything in sight, then turned toward the door again with the silent observation that it was yet too early in the evening for an adventure of profit.

The waterman paused with his hand on the knob and cast another glance up the wharf — then shaded his eyes with his hands and looked once more. There was something moving toward him, but he could only make out as yet that it was a very small object, and was about to dismiss it with the conclusion that it was merely one of the prowling urchins of the docks.

"Say, wait!" The voice was small and thin, with an imperious note of command in it. "Wait, I say!" came the call again.

"Well, kid, what d'ye want?" growled the waterman, facing about reluctantly. "Time brats was abed." Then he drew his breath in sharply with an exclamation of surprise: "It's a gal!"

It was a girl, a mere midget of a thing, that came into the circle of light cast by the arc. The child went straight to the waterman's side, and laid her hand detainingly on his arm. "I was most sure you'd wait," she said. "I want a boat, a great big boat, to go out there." She waved a hand indefinitely toward the water.

Captain Morain took a look at the child and made out that she could not have been more than seven or eight years of age, and that

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her face was fair, and that she had long hair that hung in disarray about her shoulders.

"That's all right, kiddie," said Captain Morain patronizingly, and laying his hand gently on the child's head. "You've got lost from your mommer, and she's lookin' for you. S'pose you could make me know where you live?" he asked.

"I ain't lost!" The little thing stamped her foot angrily, and looked up at him with a womanly face in which impatience drove back tears. "I come here 'cause I wanted to. I want a boat. And a big man like you can tell me where I can get it." She clung to his coat-sleeve, as if fearing that he would get away.

"You want a boat?" The old captain looked down on the child with indulgent amusement. "Come, sissie," he said, ingratiatingly, "what you goin' to do with a boat? You come in here where it's nice and warm and tell me all about it." He threw open the door of the cabin.

The child gave one glance at the brightly lighted interior. "Will you help me? Are you a good man?" she asked, looking up into his face, and pressing his arm with both her small hands.

The child's eyes were large, blue, entreating, and Captain Morain withdrew his own gaze after a few moments' look at her. "Am I good man?" he said softly, then looked off over the water for a long time. Finally he forced his eyes back to the child again, a strange, tremulous harshness in his voice. "I'll be good to you, kid," he said. "Yes, I'll be good to you."

"And you'll help me, too?" The child still kept her eyes upon him.

"Oh, yes, I'll help you," he said, thinking to humor her whim.

The little girl cast a sharp, furtive glance up and down the wharf, then she darted into the cabin. "Come in," she said, pulling at the sleeve of his coat. The waterman obeyed, and the child gave the door a quick push, sending it closed.

"Sit down!" commanded the child. She endeavored to push the great bulk of the waterman into a seat, and then she hopped up on the chair facing him. There was something more than play tragedy in her voice and eyes, and yet, withal, something wonderfully sweet. "Yes, you look good," she said, after a long inspection. She waved him to silence with her hand. "Here's some

The Captain's Special Passenger.*

BY FRANK H. SWEET.

IT was possibly nine o'clock in the evening, with the sky overcast and threatening rain. Captain Morain had just returned from a final inspection of the three good launches that swung at the landing-float, and was hoping that something worth while would turn up, for he was feeling rather more than fit and very much on the make, as he put it to himself. When he reached the door of his cabin he took a last look up and down the wharf to see whether there were anything in sight, then turned toward the door again with the silent observation that it was yet too early in the evening for an adventure of profit.

The waterman paused with his hand on the knob and cast another glance up the wharf — then shaded his eyes with his hands and looked once more. There was something moving toward him, but he could only make out as yet that it was a very small object, and was about to dismiss it with the conclusion that it was merely one of the prowling urchins of the docks.

"Say, wait!" The voice was small and thin, with an imperious note of command in it. "Wait, I say!" came the call again.

"Well, kid, what d'ye want?" growled the waterman, facing about reluctantly. "Time brats was abed." Then he drew his breath in sharply with an exclamation of surprise: "It's a gal!"

It was a girl, a mere midget of a thing, that came into the circle of light cast by the arc. The child went straight to the waterman's side, and laid her hand detainingly on his arm. "I was most sure you'd wait," she said. "I want a boat, a great big boat, to go out there." She waved a hand indefinitely toward the water.

Captain Morain took a look at the child and made out that she could not have been more than seven or eight years of age, and that

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her face was fair, and that she had long hair that hung in disarray about her shoulders.

"That's all right, kiddie," said Captain Morain patronizingly, and laying his hand gently on the child's head. "You've got lost from your mommer, and she's lookin' for you. S'pose you could make me know where you live?" he asked.

"I ain't lost!" The little thing stamped her foot angrily, and looked up at him with a womanly face in which impatience drove back tears. "I come here 'cause I wanted to. I want a boat. And a big man like you can tell me where I can get it." She clung to his coat-sleeve, as if fearing that he would get away.

"You want a boat?" The old captain looked down on the child with indulgent amusement. "Come, sissie," he said, ingratiatingly, "what you goin' to do with a boat? You come in here where it's nice and warm and tell me all about it." He threw open the door of the cabin.

The child gave one glance at the brightly lighted interior. "Will you help me? Are you a good man?" she asked, looking up into his face, and pressing his arm with both her small hands.

The child's eyes were large, blue, entreating, and Captain Morain withdrew his own gaze after a few moments' look at her. "Am I good man?" he said softly, then looked off over the water for a long time. Finally he forced his eyes back to the child again, a strange, tremulous harshness in his voice. "I'll be good to you, kid," he said. "Yes, I'll be good to you."

"And you'll help me, too?" The child still kept her eyes upon him.

"Oh, yes, I'll help you," he said, thinking to humor her whim.

The little girl cast a sharp, furtive glance up and down the wharf, then she darted into the cabin. "Come in," she said, pulling at the sleeve of his coat. The waterman obeyed, and the child gave the door a quick push, sending it closed.

"Sit down!" commanded the child. She endeavored to push the great bulk of the waterman into a seat, and then she hopped up on the chair facing him. There was something more than play tragedy in her voice and eyes, and yet, withal, something wonderfully sweet. "Yes, you look good," she said, after a long inspection. She waved him to silence with her hand. "Here's some

money," she went on. "There's two bits in there, and I want to get a boat." She held out a soiled handkerchief with a knot in one corner.

"Now, you're a nice little girl," said Captain Morain, "and you shall have a boat ride, too. You must come down some nice, bright day, and we'll go 'way off there. But you tell me your mommer's name, and I'll take you home to her now, 'cause it's too late for a little gal to be out." He endeavored to put his clumsy old arm about her shoulder.

The child turned her eyes upon him, blinking the lids fast, and clicking the little jaws. "You just don't understand, that's all!" she said. "My mamma's goin' to Heaven to-night, and she's tryin' to wait for papa to come, and I'm goin' after him in a boat," she said, simply.

"Your——" Captain Morain could get no further than that; he walked over to one corner of the room.

"My papa"—she put her hand to her full little throat as if something hurt her there, but she conquered the feeling in a minute—"my papa's brave; he's a soldier," she said, hopping to the floor and drawing herself up in a womanly way. "But bad men didn't like papa, 'cause he come home to see mamma and me one time when mamma was sick."

"Yes," the waterman prompted.

"And now they won't let him come home any more, and they took his gun away and his nice soldier clothes, and he just had to work and work and they lock him up at night—and mamma wants him to come."

"A de—" The captain clipped the word, though he felt that the child could not understand what it meant to be a deserter. "Yes," he continued, "and where is he now?"

"He's over there on an island," she said. "I went to see him with a lady yesterday. And I told papa to come home. He couldn't come just then. They wouldn't let him come."

Captain Morain said something harsh under his breath, and the arm of the chair cracked in his hand.

"But papa said—" The little girl went close to the waterman and laid her little hand on his coarse, hard palm. "Papa said that if I'd come to the island with a boat to-night he'd come

home with me then, and that they couldn't keep him. But I was to come very careful and not let any bad man know."

"Yes." Captain Morain drew the child a little closer to him. "Did he say what part of the island?" he asked huskily.

"Yes, on the side away from the lighthouse, he said. And here's my money," she answered. "You'll help me get a boat, 'cause you're a good man," she said.

"Gods, what a kid!" said Captain Morain. "Yes, I'll help you get him, kiddie." He drew her between his knees. "Give me your money," he said.

The child passed him the handkerchief in a matter-of-fact, business-like way. The waterman untied the knot, took the handkerchief and the small coin and walked over to a locker, with his back to the child. There was a jingling, golden sound. When Captain Morain turned to the child once more he was just dropping the handkerchief into his pocket, and it was tied in a knot again, but this time by its four corners, and was so bulky that it would hardly go into the pocket.

"Said he'd be there for certain?" asked the captain.

"Sure, and my papa never stories," she answered proudly, a brave smile lighting her face.

"Then come on, we'll go!" The old waterman swept the child fiercely into his arms and clasped her more tightly than there was need to do; and the child put her arms about his neck, and patted his hard old face. The little girl's heart beat against the waterman's ear, and he held her so that she might not move it away.

Out into the night they went and down on to the float.

"Now, you must sit perfectly still and not make the least bit of noise," he said, and put the child gently down on a cushion in the engine room. "And don't be afraid of the water," he said, after casting off. "And when I put out the lights pretty soon you won't let the dark scare you."

"I ain't afraid when I'm with you," she whispered, looking trustingly into his face.

Captain Morain put his head out the window and reconnoitered the night for some time. When he drew in his head again she was still looking at him; and then she turned admiringly to the burnished machinery, and slipped along on the locker till she was

very close to his side; then she put out her little fat hand and closed it over one of the captain's fingers.

Such a run as that was! All the way along the water front and half-way over to the island the "Flyer" carried all her regular lights. All the way the child kept her tight grip of the waterman's hand. And though he had to manage both wheel and engine with one hand, there was an expression on the waterman's face that said he would wreck his launch before he would use both hands to it.

"My, you're brave! Just like my papa," she said several times. "And you just know everything, too!"

When the lights went out and they slipped along in the dark, she appreciated the need of silence. "There it is," she said in an awed voice, as the beacon on the island came into view, dotted out with lesser lights behind it. "But papa will be on the other side," she said, seeing that the launch was headed straight for the light.

"You'll leave it to me, won't you?" asked Captain Morain.

A squeeze of his hand was the answer.

The island is very small, not over five acres in extent, and in no place does the shore run down to the bay, but there is more or less of a sheer rock wall on every side. The launch drew close and closer to the beacon. Something of vital interest had caught the eye of the wary old waterman. A number of lights were moving to and fro, and he well knew that it was a searching party looking for an escaped prisoner.

The "Flyer" slipped very close to the shore; so close that the man and the child could hear the words of command, and without difficulty count the lanterns. While the launch lay there within rifle-shot of the soldiers, Morain was turning over schemes in his brain. If he could only attract the different searching parties to this part of the island, it would leave the other side free. Then he decided what he should do. Like the sudden flash of a meteor the searchlight of the launch struck upon the shore, then roamed back and forth in a small arc. The child's grip tightened convulsively on the waterman's hand. There came a command from the land — then two or three flashes and sharp reports. There was a tinkle of breaking glass, and a bullet flattened against the cylinder of the engine.

With a muffled oath and a quick movement of his free hand, Captain Morain switched off the light. They could hear the men running, and calling, and stumbling.

Then the "Flyer" bounded away into the dark, fast as she could go. It was a hard and difficult task to go round that island on a night so dark, and with only one hand for both engine and steering-gear; but not so much as an inch did the old waterman move the hand by which the child held; he was experiencing a fierce joy in the clasp of the soft little fingers. Had there been a light to shine upon the captain's face, it would have shown it hard, eager, and yet with a soft something in the eyes that no one had ever seen there before.

The splash of the waves against the shore was just about sufficient to drown the muffled explosions of the engine. With nothing but his unerring sense of distance to guide him, for even the tiny light at the compass was extinguished, Captain Morain pressed the launch into the dark at her very best speed. He put his head out the window and sniffed at the air, and pricked his old ears to distinguish the different sounds of the water-washed rocks. At the end of ten minutes he brought the launch to a sudden stop, and they lay rocking idly on the water. They had arrived at a point which the old waterman judged to be exactly opposite the light on the other side.

"Your pa is up there somewhere," whispered Captain Morain, and felt the child press a little closer to him.

It was one thing to know approximately where a man was; and it was another thing to get him off a small fortified rock with doubled sentries at every point, and searching parties out. There was only one way, the captain decided — the boldest way.

Tenderly, with infinite care, Captain Morain took the child in his arms and carried her out on the deck and stood her in the bow. Then he explained that as soon as the light was turned on she was to call aloud for her father to come.

With a little maneuvering, the "Flyer" was so turned that her head was directly toward shore. Then the search-light was turned on. Up the steep bank sprang the beam, and raced back and forth, showing three sentries walking their beats, but not a sign of the man they sought.

Captain Morain breathed hard; they couldn't stand this long, for one sentry was already pointing a gun their way. Out on the deck stood the child, her head and shoulders sharp cut in the beam of light. "Papa! Papa, here I am!" she called, in tones that carried well up the hill. "Here I am, papa!" she called again, wistfully, bravely, holding out her arms like a woman.

Captain Morain saw the middle sentry toss his gun aside and dart toward the edge of the cliff. The old waterman guessed at once that some desperate ruse had enabled the escaped prisoner to overcome a sentry and hold his place for a short while.

"Run, papa, run!" the little girl cried, recognizing the man.

A rifle cracked to the right, but its bullet did no harm, for the man was still dashing forward. Captain Morain turned his light full in the direction whence the shot had come, blinding the sentry so that he could not see to fire again.

Then there came the sharp, spiteful crack of a rifle to the left. The search-light blinked, and it was absolutely dark again.

The old waterman ran forward to the bow. The child was just where he had placed her; she was peering down into the water.

"Papa, papa, here I am, papa," she was calling softly.

The captain heard something at the side of his boat; he thrust the boat-hook down over the side, reached with his hand, and, with a mighty effort, drew a man aboard.

"My dear, brave papa!" the child exclaimed, and threw herself on the man's neck. Then she reached backward with her other hand, and it fell on the waterman's rough face. "I want you to know my brave, good papa," she said. "I told you he would come."

A half-hour later the "Flyer" was back at her float again, and the child and the man slipped ashore. The man wore a new suit of clothes, and in one pocket there was a bulgy, soiled handkerchief tied by its four corners, and it jingled musically when the child accidentally kicked it with her foot.

The Moran Twins.*

BY C. B. LOOMIS.

I WAS in need of an office boy, and had inserted a notice in the morning paper and had had the usual run of applicants in response, but none of them suited me until Billy Moran put in his appearance.

Billy was about sixteen years old, short for his age, with fiery red hair and an unmistakably New York accent.

When he came to apply for the position and I asked him his name, I did not understand his reply, so I said:

"Write it down."

He wrote in an unusually good hand, "William Moran."

"Oh, William Moran," said I.

"No, sir; Mawren, me father called it an' that's the way."

I afterward ascertained that he was right, and that Moran, with the accent on the last syllable, was purely American, and not Irish.

"Are you afraid of work?" I asked.

"Chee, no! I never was near enough to it to be afraid," said he, and that answer made me resolve to engage him.

"We want a boy to run errands, copy letters, go to the bank and do whatever he is told to do."

"I know," said he, spitting through his teeth on the hard wood floor. "That's what me twin brother does."

"Well, if your twin brother does it, don't you do it. I don't want any spitting around here."

He smiled cheerfully and said, "I meant me twin brother, Chamesy, was holdin' down a job like dat."

I have always been interested in twins, and I enquired:

"Does your twin brother look like you?" It did not seem possible that there could be another boy as homely as Billy. Prob-

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ably his twin brother was very handsome, in order to preserve the self-respect of his parents.

"He's me dead ringer!" said he. "Anybody can see dat. He's waitin' on de corner for me."

I made no answer, but as I was very desirous of seeing Billy's replica, I hurried out of the office, after having sent him to the cashier with the news that he was engaged.

Our office — we are in the wholesale dry goods business — is on Thomas Street, not far from Broadway, and when I reached that thoroughfare I saw Billy's living image smoking a cigarette with an air that would have made a hit if he had been playing the part of a street boy on the stage, it was so fetchingly nonchalant and "devilish."

I stepped up to him, half expecting him to recognize me because he looked so like his brother, but he looked right past me, being interested in the efforts of a crowded automobile to run in between a trolley and a heavily loaded dray.

"Chee, I wish dey'd hit it," said he, thinking out loud.

"James," said I, and he turned and looked at me in surprise.

"Did you speak?" said he, in a tone that was if anything tougher than his brother's.

"Yes. Are you James Mawren?" said I, careful to give the Irish pronunciation.

"Naw, I'm Chames Morán," said he — "I'm Amerikin."

He gave me a searching glance. "Are you ther feller that advertised fer a boy?"

"Yes, and I've just engaged your brother, but he told me that Mawren was the way to pronounce his name."

"Chee, he makes me sick to me stummick," said he with a weary expression. "He's as Irish as Billy Bedam — but I'm Amerikin from der woid go."

"But you're twins," said I, wishing that Billy would come up and join his brother, that I might compare them. This boy's hair was a little redder than his brother's, but his nose was just as tip tilted and he was precisely as homely.

"Yes, we're twins, but he makes me tired jus' de same. Say, w'en's he comin'?"

"He ought to be right along now." I looked back as I spoke,

and thought I saw him coming out of our store, but just at that moment I was hailed by a business friend on a Broadway car, and as I wanted to talk to him on a matter of importance, I jumped upon the car with a hasty good-bye to the little tough.

Next day Billy began work, and he proved to be a bright, happy little chap. He was respectful, reasonably heedful of what was said to him, and very quick on his feet. The cashier reported on him favorably, and I was glad to have at last found a boy that suited, as we had been having a succession of stupid or vicious or lazy boys, and a boy of either of those types takes a good deal out of a man in the way of nervous force.

But Billy was just the boy for the place, for at least two weeks. And then one day at noon he came to me and said:

"Me brother Chamesy is out of a job. Is dere a chanst here?"

I shook my head. "No, Billy, I don't believe there is."

"Well, if I was took sick could Chamesy take me place?"

"Why, yes. Are you expecting to be 'took sick'?" said I.

He started to spit and remembered. He was always starting to spit and remembering. "No, I'm all right, but — say I wanted to go to a ball game or to Cooney fer a day would it be all right if he came?"

I thought it over a minute.

"I can't see that it would make any great difference," said I. "But is your brother as quick and as — as reliable as you?"

"Aw, he's me twin," said he in a tone that seemed to settle the question, and so I told him that if he wanted now and then to go he might, but as his brother wouldn't quite know the ropes, I wouldn't want it to happen often.

"How will you get him to work for you?" said I.

"Oh, I'll give him me wages fer the days he comes. Y'see since he was out of a job he's go'n' to Cooney or somew'eres 'most every day an' he makes me crazy to try them loopin' the loops an' the other things, an' I thought, me comin' so late in the spring, I wouldn't have any vacation, an' I could take it that way." Then, in his mercurial way, he changed the subject and said, "Say, boss, did youse ever see Mansfiel' in Dr. Jekyll an' Mr. Hyde?"

"Yes, a good many years ago," said I.

His face lighted up. "Say, ain' he a peach? Me brudder an'

me was to see him las' night up in der nigger heaven, an' he's a honey cooler fer fair. Every time he comes to N'York we go."

"Well, you show good taste, Billy. Now that Booth is dead he comes near being our greatest actor."

"Say, does he wear a false face, or is it muggin'?"

"I guess it's muggin'," said I, wondering where he could have picked up so English an expression.

A day or two later, when I arrived at the office, I heard some one singing "Bedelia" in a very loud, but not unmusical voice, and I soon discovered it to be Billy. As he was usually very quiet I was surprised, but I said nothing, as he seemed to be on the last verse. The verse ended, he spat on the floor. This called for sharp reproof, and I said, "Billy, I've told you not to spit and I don't want you to sing."

He walked right up to me and said with an assumption of *camaraderie* that was amusing:

"Mr. Larkin, w'ot's a little t'ing like that between frien's?"

Something in his tone caused me to look at him keenly.

"Why, are you — are you James?" said I.

"Sure. I t'ought you was on. Billy had a chanst to go wid St. Peter's excursion up to Iona Islan' an' he ast me to hol' down his job."

"Oh," said I. "Well, try to hold it down as well as he does and remember to keep quiet and don't expectorate."

"Don't what?"

"Don't spit."

"Chee, w'ere's a feller *to* spit? Ye can't do it in der cars or on der sidewalk. Nex' t'ing dey won't allow it in a feller's home."

"There are some homes where it doesn't go even now, James," said I. "You're no better off for spitting."

"Feels good," said he, and I turned away to hide my face.

That was a noisy day. Black is not more different from white than was James Moràn from Billy Mawren. He was nothing short of impudent to me several times, but he was impudent in such a whimsical way that my sense of dignity was not as stout as my sense of humor and I put up with things that would have won a discharge in many offices.

When he went home that evening — so the shipping clerk told me afterward — he broke out into a song and dance of the most abandoned description.

"I hope Billy won't take another day off," said he.

Next morning I saw by the paper which I read on my way into town that a boy had been lost from St. Peter's excursion, and that up to the time of going to press he had not turned up, and it was feared he was drowned.

I was sure it was Billy, and felt a real depression, for I had learned to like the quiet little fellow.

To my relief I met him coming out of the store as I went in.

"Hello, you didn't get lost, then?"

He slapped a copy of the *Sun* in his side pocket and said:

"No, that was on'y a kid — about nine years old. He'll toin up all right."

"Well, Billy, I hope you had a good time yesterday, but I think that the plan won't work very well. Your brother is rather noisy."

Billy's expression was sympathetic in the extreme.

"Chee, boss, I tol' him to keep his mout' shut. He's been brought up bad."

"Why, how's that?" said I. "You both had the same bringing up, didn't you?"

"Yes, but me mudder had a favorite an' it was him. She hadn' time to train us bot' an' she let him do as he pleased. I'll have him quiet nex' time. Say, we had a great time. I hit der nigger t'ree times out of five wit' a baseball. Chee, w'ot a hard nut. Plunked him right on der place w'ere his bald spot'll be."

I opened the door to go in. "Well, I'm glad you had a good time. You look burned."

"Chee, I'd ought t'be. I never wore me hat — lost it overboard before we got to Twenty-thoid Street."

It was a week before Billy felt the need of another outing, and then as soon as I reached the office I knew he was away.

"You lika-me an' I lika you," was being sung at the top of a tuneful voice, and if I had not had ears I could have traced my quarry by a line of expectorations. I found James in the private office, standing before a mirror, "mugging" while he sang.

"Now that will do," said I, sternly.

"It was just go'n' to do," said he, in a mimicry of myself that I recognized as being capital. My handkerchief came out and I left the private office to obtain command of my features.

"Fond of actin', Boss?" said he, when I went in again to open my desk.

"James, I must decline to talk theatre with you. I've got my letters to look at."

"It ain' so hard to do that imertation of a bass vi'l that Mansfiel' does in Prince Karl," said he, pertinaciously. "I seen him las' night. How's dis?"

The next instant there was the plaintive and nasal boom of a 'cello and James was giving an imitation of a master mimic that bettered his master — to speak in a paradox.

"You and Billy seem to be fond of the theatre," said I.

"We'd have a chanst to do a toin as a twin team on'y we haven't got a good ac' yet. We was at Miner's for one night. Got a recall, too, but I gave an imertation of der way der stage manager talked an' he got hot an' chased us."

"James, will you please go and ask Mr. Wilson to give you something to do outdoors. I haven't opened the mail yet."

"Aw, tell me you're sick of me an' I'll skate. You can't hurt *my* feelin's."

He went out of the office, dancing a double shuffle, with his head very affectedly on one side and an extra tilt to his snub nose, and I dived into my desk to hunt for something.

After he had gone I relieved my pent-up feelings by laughing.

A step on the threshold made me look up.

There stood James, a grin on his face.

"*I t'ought* I'd get a smile out of you. I can deliver de goods every time. Aw, I never was cut out fer business."

"Leave me," said I, sternly, and he went out.

I had found Billy to be perfectly honest, and he was in the habit of carrying the deposit around to the bank on Broadway. On the occasion of James's first day with us the cashier had taken the deposit up himself, but to-day, being very busy, he called the boy in and told him to take it and to be very careful, as there was over two hundred dollars in bills, to say nothing of the checks.

"If I'm not back in half an hour sen' me a Marconi. I might go to Europe."

With a cheerful grin he took the deposit and slid out of the office and then took to his heels and ran the length of the store, singing "Bedelia" as he went.

"That boy is incorrigible," said the cashier.

"Oh, yes. We can't have him another day. It's queer there should be such a difference between them. He seems just as smart as Billy, but he's possessed of a devil."

"Did you hear him say he was going to Europe with the deposit?" said the cashier, coming out from behind his desk.

"Yes, but that doesn't worry me. He looks honest enough."

But if "Chamesy" looked honest he did not turn out so.

He had gone to the bank at half-past two, and he should have been back by a quarter of three, as he had nothing else to do, but three and four came without bringing Billy's brother.

We sent a clerk around to the bank and learned that our deposit had not been brought in, but that the checks and the slip had been found on the marble floor near the paying teller's desk.

James had said that Billy was going to Coney Island. Could the two be in league?

I would have gone at once to the home of the twins, but I understood that Billy had taken his mother with him to Coney Island, and they were going to stay to see the tower lighted. I would therefore wait until morning before doing anything. Perhaps James would turn up.

Next morning I was at the office early and found — not James, but Billy! He was waiting to get in, the porter not having put in an appearance, although it was half-past seven. Billy looked worried.

"W'ere's Chamesy?" was his first question.

I looked him searchingly in the eyes and what I saw in their honest depths made me hate to tell him the truth, but I had to.

I tactfully acquainted him with what had happened.

"Oh, wouldn' dat make you sick to your stummick," said he, and walked with bowed head in at the door.

The office force assembled in course of time — much surprised to find one of the heads there before them — and we held a consultation and decided to do what we should have done the day before, — telephone to the police.

Billy, the picture of melancholy, went about his work for awhile, and then he went downstairs to the shipping department, and the various clerks said pleasant things about the little chap whose brother's rascality had made such a deep impression on him.

When the detective came, the first thing he wanted to do was to have an interview with Billy, and I sent downstairs for him.

He was not there.

For a short moment I suspected he had fled and then the shipping clerk told me that he had sent him around to Tifft, Howells & Company on an errand.

"Where does his mother live?" was the next question.

We found her address, and he and I were soon on our way to her home, in Mulberry Street, not far from Houston, and not very far from police headquarters.

She lived in a rear tenement, whose hallway approach was noisome in the extreme. We found her engaged in hanging out clothes, for she was a washerwoman.

"Is this Mrs. Moran?" said the detective, with the accent on the "ran."

A startled look came into her eyes. "Sure it is. What's happened to Billy?"

"It's happened to Ja-mes," said the policeman.

"An' who the divvle's Ja-mes?" said she, with a long-drawn breath of relief.

"Jamesy, Billy's twin brother," said I, thinking she had not understood the officer's pronunciation of James.

"Feth, an' is it twins you're talkin' about? Sure me twins died when they was babies an' it's only Billy I have, an' care enough at that wid his play actin' ways."

I looked at her in astonishment, as light began to break on me.

"Do you mean to tell me that you have but one son?"

"Yes, that's all. What's happened him?" said she, her anxiety returning.

The detective explained what had happened, and the poor woman's apron was over her head in a minute, and for the first time in my life I heard real keening.

"Oh, he was always actin' but I didn't t'ink he'd do anyt'ing dirty. Him stalein', — an' the father he had."

I have never been more depressed by anything than I now was at the outcome of this incident. And I found that much of my sorrow came from the thought that the Billy who had made such a good impression on me had never existed; that he was really Jamesy all the time, and acting a part to lull my suspicions. His bravado in coming back was all of a piece with his whole conception of the part. By now he had really decamped with the picayune $200.

I left the detective questioning the distracted mother, and went back to the office. I would never put confidence in a boy again.

As I turned off Broadway to Thomas I thought I saw Billy-James going up the steps of our store. I hurried after, and found to my great relief that I was right in my surmise.

Quite irrelevantly the thought of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde came into my mind, and then I saw that Billy himself had been playing the double part suggested by the play.

Into the office I hurried, wondering whether he were going to make restitution or brazen it out.

There I found — not Billy, but Chamesy, for he was spitting through his teeth and laughing gaily and flourishing a bank roll.

"Didn't I do it fine?" he was saying to the cashier.

The cashier, who thought that James had been overcome by qualms of conscience, held out his hand for the money and said:

"Boy, do you know that your brother Billy is all broken up over what you did?"

Chamesy-Billy roared with laughter and hunched his shoulders with delight.

"Better'n an' better," said he.

Then he turned to me. "Did I fool you too, Mr. Larkin?"

"William-James," said I, solemnly, "You've lost your position with this house. You'd better apply to Richard Mansfield for a position. The dry goods business is not the proper place for the display of your histrionic talents."